LILIAN

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Cover

LILIAN

BY
Arnold Bennett

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TO
BERTIE SULLIVAN
AND
AMARYLLIS
WITH AFFECTION AND GRATITUDE

CONTENTS.

PART I

I. The Girl Alone

II. Early Years

III. Advice to the Young Beauty

IV. The Clubman

V. The Devotee

VI. The Telephone

PART II

I. The Suicide

II. The Malady

III. Shut

IV. The Vizier

V. The Martyr

VI. The Invitation

VII. The Avowal

VIII. Philosophy of the Grey-Haired

PART III

I. In the Hotel

II. The Big Yacht

III. The Casino

IV. Chemin de fer

V. In the Hills

VI. The Benefactress

VII. The Doctor

VIII. Marriage

IX. The Widow

X. The Wreath

PART IV

I. The Return

II. Miss Grig

III. The Lieutenant

IV. The New Employer

V. Layette

PART I

LILIAN

I
The Girl Alone

Lilian, in dark blue office frock with an embroidered red line round the neck and detachable black wristlets that preserved the ends of the sleeves from dust and friction, sat idle at her flat desk in what was called "the small room" at Felix Grig's establishment in Clifford Street, off Bond Street. There were three desks, three typewriting machines and three green-shaded lamps. Only Lilian's lamp was lighted, and she sat alone, with darkness above her chestnut hair and about her, and a circle of radiance below. She was twenty-three. Through the drawn blind of the window could just be discerned the backs of the letters of words painted on the glass: "Felix Grig. Typewriting Office. Open day and night." Seen from the street the legend stood out black and clear against the faintly glowing blind. It was 11 P.M.

That a beautiful young girl, created for pleasure and affection and expensive flattery, should be sitting by herself at 11 P.M. in a gloomy office in Clifford Street, in the centre of the luxurious, pleasure-mad, love-mad West End of London seemed shocking and contrary to nature, and Lilian certainly so regarded it.

She pictured the shut shops, and shops and yet again shops, filled with elegance and costliness--robes, hats, stockings, shoes, gloves, incredibly fine lingerie, furs, jewels, perfumes--designed and confected for the setting-off of just such young attractiveness as hers. She pictured herself rifling those deserted and silent shops by some magic means and emerging safe, undetected, in batiste so rare that her skin blushed through it, in a frock that was priceless and yet nothing at all, and in warm marvellous sables that no blast of wind or misfortune could ever penetrate--and diamonds in her hair. She pictured thousands of smart women, with imperious command over rich, attendant males, who at that very moment were moving quickly in automobiles from theatres towards the dancing-clubs that clustered round Felix Grig's typewriting office. At that very moment she herself ought to have been dancing. Not in a smart club; no! Only in the basement of a house where an acquaintance of hers lodged; and only with clerks and things like that; and only to a gramophone. But still a dance, a respite from the immense ennui and solitude called existence!

She had been kept late at the office because of Miss Grig's failure to arrive. Miss Grig, sister of Felix, was the mainspring of the establishment, which, except financially, belonged much more to her than to Felix. Miss Grig energized it, organized it, and disciplined it, in addition to loving it. Hers had been the idea--not quite original, but none the less very valuable as an advertisement--of remaining open all night. Clever men would tell simpletons in men's clubs about the typewriting office that was never closed--example of the inexhaustible wonderfulness of a great capital!--and would sometimes with a wink and a single phrase endow the office with a dubious and exciting reputation. Miss Grig herself was the chief night-watcher. She exulted in vigils. After attendance in the afternoon, if her health was reasonably good, she would come on duty again at 8 P.M. and go home by an early Tube train on the following morning. One of the day staff would remain until 8 P.M. in order to hand over to her; as a recompense this girl would be let off at 4 P.M. instead of 6 P.M. the next day. Justice reigned; and all the organization for dealing with rushes of work was inspired by Miss Grig's own admirable ideas of justice.

On this night Lilian had been appointed to stay till 8 o'clock. Eight o'clock--no Miss Grig. Eight-thirty o'clock--no Miss Grig. Nine, nine-thirty, ten o'clock--no Miss Grig. And now eleven o'clock and no Miss Grig. It was unprecedented and dreadfully disturbing. Lilian even foresaw a lonely, horrible night in the office, with nothing but tea, bread-and-butter, and the living gas-stove to comfort her. Agonizing prospect! She had spent nights in the office before, but never alone. She felt that she simply could not support the ordeal; yet--such was the moral, invisible empire of absent Miss Grig--she dared not shut up the office and depart. The office naturally had a telephone, but most absurdly there was no telephone

at the Grigs' house--Felix's fault!--and so Lilian could only speculate upon the explanation of Miss Grig's absence. She speculated melodramatically.

Then her lovely little ear, quickened by apprehension, heard footsteps on the lower stairs. Heavy footsteps, but rapid enough! She flew through the ante-room to the outer door and fearfully opened it, and gazed downwards to the electric light that, somehow equivocally, invited wayfarers to pass through the ever-open street door and climb the shadowy steps to the second storey and behold there strange matters.

A villainous old fellow was hurrying up the echoing stairs. He wore a pea-jacket and a red cotton muffler. A moment ago she had had no thought of personal danger. Now, in an instant, she was petrified with fright. Her face turned from rose to grey.... Of course it was a hold-up! Post offices, and box offices of theatres, and even banks had been held up of late. Banks, Felix Grig had heard, were taking precautions. Felix had suggested that he too ought to take precautions--revolvers, alarm-bells, etc.--but Miss Grig, not approving, had smiled her wise, condescending smile, and nothing had been done. Miss Grig (thought Lilian) had no imagination--that was what was wrong with her!

"Miss!" growled hoarsely the oncoming bandit, "give us a match, will ye?"

Yes, they always began thus innocently, did robbers. Lilian tried to speak and could not. She could not even dash within and bang and bolt the door. With certain crises she might possibly be able to deal, but not with this sort of crisis. She was as defenceless as a blossom. She thought passionately that destiny had no right to put her in such a terrible extremity, and that the whole world was to blame. She felt as once women used to feel in the sack of cities, faint with fear--and streaks of thrilled, eager, voluptuous anticipation running through the fear! She reflected that the matches were on the mantelpiece over the gas-stove.

The man stood on the landing. He had an odour. He was tall; he would have made four of Lilian. She knew that it was ridiculous to retreat into the office and find the matches demanded; she knew that the matches were only a pretext; she knew that she ought to hit on some brilliant expedient for outwitting the bandit and winning eternal glory in the evening papers; but she retreated into the office to find the matches. He followed heavily behind her. He was within her room.... She could not have turned to face him for ropes of great pearls.

"Give us a box, miss. It's a windy night. Two of me lamps is blown out, and I dropped me matches into me tea-can--ha, ha!--and I ain't got no paper to carry a light from me fire, and I ain't seen a bobby for an hour. No, I hain't, though you wouldn't believe me."

Lilian was suddenly blinded by the truth. The roadway of Clifford Street and part of Bond Street was in the midst of a process of deep excavation; it was acutely "up," to the detriment of traffic and trade; and this fellow was the night-

watchman who sat in a sentry-box by a burning brazier. She recognized him....

"Thank ye kindly, miss, and may God bless yer! I knowed ye was open all night. Good night. Hope I didn't frighten ye, miss." He laughed grimly, roguishly and honestly.

When he was gone Lilian laughed also, but hysterically. She did not at all want to laugh, but she laughed. Then she dropped into her chair and wept with painful sobbing violence. And as, regaining calm, she realized the horrors which might have happened to her, the resentment in her heart against destiny and against the whole world grew intense and filled her heart to the exclusion of every other feeling.

II
Early Years

Miss Share, as she was addressed in the office, was the only child of an art-master, and until she found the West End she had lived all her life in a long Putney "road," no house of which could truthfully say that it was in any way better than or different from its neighbours. This street realized the ideal of equality before God. It had been Lilian's prison, from which she was let out for regular daily exercise, and she hated it as ardently as any captive ever hated a prison. Lionel Share had had charge over the art side of an enormous polytechnic in another suburb. In youth he had won a national scholarship at South Kensington, and the glory of the scholarship never faded--not even when he was elected President of the Association of Art Masters. He was destined by fate to be a teacher of art, and appointed by heaven to be a headmaster and to reach the highest height of artistic pedagogy. He understood organization; the handling of committees, of undermasters and of pupils; the filling-up of forms; the engaging of models; and he understood profoundly the craft of pushing pupils successfully through examinations. His name was a sweet odour in the nostrils of the London County Council. He rehabilitated art and artists in Putney, which admitted that it had had quite a wrong notion of art and artists, having hitherto regarded art as unmanly, and artists as queer, loose, bankruptcy-bound fellows; whereas Mr. Share paid his rent promptly, went to Margate for his long holiday, wore a frock-coat, attended church, and had been mentioned as a suitable candidate for the Putney Borough

Council. Until Mr. Share Putney had never been able to explain to itself the respectability of the National Gallery, which after all was full of art done by artists. The phenomenon of Mr. Share solved the enigma--the Old Masters must have been like Lionel Share.

At home Mr. Share was a fat man with a black beard and moustache, who adored his daughter and loved his wife. A strict monogamist, whose life would bear the fullest investigation, he was, nevertheless, what is euphemistically called "uxorious." He returned home of a night--often late, on account of evening classes--with ravishment. He knew that his wife and daughter would be ready to receive him, and they were. He kissed and fondled them. He praised them to their faces, asserting that their like could not be discovered among womankind, and he repeated again and again that his little Lilian was very beautiful. He ate and drank a good supper. If he loved his wife he loved also eating and drinking. Now and then he would arrive with half a bottle of champagne sticking out of his overcoat pocket. Not that he came within a thousand miles of "drinking"! He did not. He would not even keep champagne or any wine (except Australian burgundy) in the house; but he would pop in at the wine merchant's when the fancy took him.

He seldom worried his dears with his professional troubles. Only if organization and committees were specially exasperating would he refer, and then but casually, to the darker side of existence. As for art, he never mentioned it, save to deride some example of "Continental" or "advanced" or "depraved" or "perverse" art (comprehensively described as "futurist") which had regrettably got into the pages of *The Studio*, the only magazine to which he subscribed. Nor did he ever in his prime paint or sketch for pleasure. But at the beginning of every year he would set to work to do a small thing or two for the Royal Academy, which small thing or two were often accepted by the Royal Academy, though never, one is sorry to say, sold. The Royal Academy soirée was Lilian's sole outlet into the great world. She could not, however, be as enthusiastic about it as were her father and mother; for in the privacy of her mind she held the women thereat to be a most dowdy and frumpy lot.

The girl loved her father and mother; she also pitied her mother and hated her father. She pitied her mother for being an utterly acquiescent slave with no will of her own, and hated her father because he had not her ambition to rise above the state of the frumpy middle middle-class--and for other reasons. The man had realized his own ambitions, and was a merry soul sunk in contentment. The world held nothing that he wanted and did not possess. He looked up to the upper classes without envy or jealousy, and read about them with ingenuous joy. He had no instinct for any sort of elegance.

Lilian was intensely ambitious, yearning after elegance. She saw illustrated advertisements of furniture in *The Studio* and of attire in the daily papers, and

compared them with the smug ugliness of the domestic interior and her plain frocks, and was passionately sad. She read about the emancipation of girls and about the "new girl," and compared this winged creature with herself. Writers in newspapers seemed to assume that all girls were new girls, and Lilian knew the awful falsity of the assumption. She rarely left Putney, unless it was to go by motor-bus to Kew Gardens on a Saturday afternoon with papa and mamma. She did not reach the West End once in a thousand years, and when she did she came back tragic. She would have contrived to reach the West End oftener, but, though full of leisure, she had no money for bus fares. Mr. Share never gave her money except for a specific purpose; and she could not complain, for her mother, an ageing woman, never had a penny that she must not account for--not a penny. Never!

Mr. Share could not conceive what either of them could want with loose money. He was not averse, he admitted, from change and progress. With great breadth of mind he admitted that change and progress were inevitable. But his attitude towards these phenomena resembled that of the young St. Augustine towards another matter, who cried: "Give me chastity, O Lord, but not yet!" In Mr. Share's view his wife and daughter had no business in the world; and indeed his finest pride was to maintain them in complete ignorance of the world. Even during the war he dissuaded Lilian from any war-work, holding that she could most meetly help the Empire to triumph by helping to solace her father in the terrific troubles of keeping a large art school alive under D.O.R.A. and the Conscription Act.

Later, Mrs. Share was struck down by cancer on the liver and died after six months' illness, which cost Mr. Share a considerable amount of money--lavishly squandered, cheerfully paid. Mr. Share was heart-broken; he really grew quite old in a fortnight; and his mute appeal to Lilian for moral succour and the balm of filial tenderness was irresistible. Lilian had lost a mother, but the main fact in the situation was that Mr. Share had lost a peerless wife. Lilian became housekeeper and the two settled down together. Mr. Share adored his daughter more than ever, and more visibly. Her freedom, always excessively limited, was now retrenched. She was transfixed eternally as the old man's prop. Her twenty-first birthday passed, and not a word as to her future, as to a marriage for her, or as to her individuality, desires, hopes! She was papa's cherished darling.

Then Mr. Share caught pneumonia, through devotion to duty, and died in a few days; and at last Lilian felt on her lovely cheek the winds of the world; at last she was free. Of high paternal finance she had never in her life heard one word. In the week following the funeral she learnt that she would be mistress of the furniture and a little over one hundred pounds net. Mr. Share had illustrated the ancient maxim that it is easier to make money than to keep it. He had held

shipping shares too long and had sold a fully paid endowment insurance policy in the vain endeavour to replace by adventurous investment that which the sea had swallowed up. And Lilian was helpless. She could do absolutely nothing that was worth money. She could not begin to earn a livelihood. As for relatives, there was only her father's brother, a Board School teacher with a large vulgar family and an income far too small to permit of generosities. Lilian was first incredulous, then horror-struck.

Leaving the youth of the world to pick up art as best it could without him, and fleeing to join his wife in paradise, the loving, adoring father had in effect abandoned a beautiful idolized daughter to the alternatives of starvation or prostitution. He had shackled her wrists behind her back and hobbled her feet and bequeathed her to wolves. That was what he had done, and what many and many such fathers had done, and still do, to their idolized daughters.

Herein was the root of Lilian's awful burning resentment against the whole world, and of her fierce and terrible determination by fair means or foul to make the world pay. Her soul was a horrid furnace, and if by chance Lionel Share leaned out from the gold bar of heaven and noticed it, the sight must have turned his thoughts towards hell for a pleasant change. She was saved from disaster, from martyrdom, from ignominy, from the unnamable, by the merest fluke. The nurse who tended Lionel Share's last hours was named Grig. This nurse had cousins in the typewriting business. She had also a very kind heart, a practical mind, and a persuasive manner with cousins.

III
Advice to the Young Beauty

"Come, come now, now poor girl! You surely aren't crying like this because you've been kept away from your dance to-night?"

Lilian gave a great start, and an "Oh!" and, searching hurriedly for a handkerchief inadequate to the damming of torrents, dried up her tears at the source, but could not immediately control the sobs that continued to convulse her whole frame.

"N-no! Mr. Grig," she whimpered feebly.

Then she snatched at a sheet of paper and began to insert it in the machine

before her, as though about to start some copying.

"Miss Grig is rather unwell," said Felix Grig. "She insisted that I should come up, and so I came." With that he tactfully left the room, obeying the wise rule of conduct under which a man conquers a woman's weeping by running away from it.

Lilian's face was red; it went still redder. She was tremendously ashamed of being caught blubbering, and by Mr. Grig! It would not have mattered if one of the girls had surprised her, or even Miss Grig. But Mr. Grig! Nor would it have mattered so much if circumstances had made possible any pretence, however absurd and false, that she was not in fact crying. But she had been trapped beyond any chance of a face-saving lie. She felt as though she had committed a sexual impropriety and could never look Mr. Grig in the eyes again. At the same time she was profoundly relieved that somebody belonging to the office, and especially a man, had arrived to break her awful solitude....

So Mr. Grig knew that she had a dance that night! There was something piquant and discomposing in that. Gertie Jackson must have chattered to Miss Grig--they were as thick as thieves, those two, or, at any rate, the good-natured Gertie flattered herself that they were--and Miss Grig must have told Felix. (Very discreetly the girls would refer among themselves to Mr. Grig as "Felix.") Brother and sister must have been talking about her and her miserable little dance. Still, a dance was a dance, and the mere word had a glorious sound. Nobody except herself knew that her dance was in a basement.... So he had not come to the office to relieve and reassure her in her unforeseen night-watch, but merely to placate his sister! And how casually, lightly, almost quizzically, he had spoken! She was naught to him--a girl typist, one among a floating population of girl typists.

Miss Grig had no distinction--her ankles proved that--but Felix was distinguished, in manner, in voice, in everything he did. Felix was a swell, like the easy *flâneurs* in Bond Street that she saw when she happened to go out of the office during work-hours. It was said that he had been married and that his wife had divorced him. Lilian surmised that if the truth were known the wife more than Felix had been to blame.

All these thoughts were mere foam on the great, darkly heaving thought that Felix had horribly misjudged her. Not his fault, of course; but he had misjudged her. Crying for a lost dance, indeed! She terribly wanted him to be made aware that she was only crying because she had experienced an ordeal to which she ought not to have been exposed and to which no girl ought to have been exposed. Miss Grig again! It was Miss Grig, not Felix, who had sneered at hold-ups. There had been no hold-up, but there might have been a hold-up, and, in any case, she had passed through the worst sensations of a hold-up. Scandalous!

Anxious to be effective, she took up the typing of a novel which had been

sent in by one of their principal customers, a literary agency, and tried to tap as prosaically as if the hour were 11.30 A.M. instead of 11.30 P.M. Bravado! She knew that she would have to do the faulty sheet again; but she must impress Felix. Then she heard Felix calling from the principals' room:

"Miss Share. Miss *Share*!" A little impatient as usual.

"Yes, Mr. Grig." She rushed to the mirror and patted herself with the tiny sponge that under Miss Grig's orders was supposed to be employed for wetting postage stamps--but never was so employed save in Miss Grig's presence.

"I shall tell him why I was crying," she said to herself as she crossed the ante-room. "And I shall tell him straight."

He was seated on the corner of the table in the principals' room, and rolling a cigarette. He had lighted the gas-stove. A very slim man of medium height and of no age, he might have been thirty-five with prematurely grizzled hair, or fifty with hair younger than the wrinkles round his grey eyes! Miss Grig had said or implied that she was younger than her brother, but the girls did not accept without reserve all that Miss Grig might say or imply. He had taken off his overcoat and now displayed a dinner-jacket and an adorably soft shirt. Lilian had never before seen him in evening-dress, for he did not come to the office at night, and nobody expected him to come to the office at night. He was wonderfully attractive in evening-dress, which he carried with the nonchalance of regular custom. So different from her father, who put on ceremonial attire about three times a year, and wore it with deplorable self-consciousness, as though it were a suit of armour! Mr. Grig was indeed a queer person to run a typewriting office. Lilian was aware that he had been to Winchester and Cambridge, and done all manner of unusual things before he lit on typewriting.

"Any work come in to-night, Miss Share?" he demanded in the bland, kindly, careless, official tone which he always employed to the girls--a tone rendering the slightest familiarity impossible. "Anybody called?"

Lilian knew that he was merely affecting an interest in the business, acting the rôle of managing proprietor. He had tired of the business long ago, and graciously left all the real power to his sister, who had no mind above typewriting.

"Someone did come in just before you, Mr. Grig," Lilian replied, seizing her chance, and in a half-challenging tone she related the adventure with the night-watchman. "It was that that upset me, Mr. Grig. It might have been a burglar--I made sure it *was*. And me all alone----"

"Quite! Quite!" he stopped her. "I can perfectly imagine how you must have felt. You haven't got over it yet, even. Sit down. Sit down." He said no word of apology for his misjudgment of her, but his tone apologized.

"Oh! I'm perfectly all right now, thank you."

"Please!" He slipped off the table and pulled round Miss Grig's chair for her.

She obediently sat down, liking to be agreeable to him. He unlocked his own cupboard and brought out a decanter and a liqueur glass. "Drink this."

"Please, what is it?"

"Brandy. Poison." He smiled.

She smiled, sipped, and coughed as the spirit burned her throat.

"I can't drink any more," she appealed.

"That's all right. That's all right."

It was his humorous use of the word "poison" that touched her. This sole word changed their relations. Hitherto they had never for a moment been other than employer and employed. Now they were something else. She was deeply flattered, assuaged, and also excited. Brought up to scorn employment, the hardest task for her in her situation in the Grig office had been to admit by her deportment that there was a bar of class between her employer and herself. The other girls addressed Mr. Grig as "Sir"; but she--never! She always called him "Mr. Grig," and nothing could have induced her to say "Sir." Now, he was protecting her; he had become the attendant male; his protection enveloped her like a soft swansdown quilt, exquisite, delicious. And it was night. The night created romance. Romance suddenly filled the room like a magic vapour, transforming him, herself, and the commonest objects of the room into something ideal.

"Several times I've wanted to speak to you about a certain matter," said Mr. Grig quietly; and paused, gazing at the smoke from his cigarette.

"Oh, yes?" Lilian murmured nervously, and strove to accomplish the demeanour of a young woman of the world. (She much regretted that she had her wristlets on.) As he was not looking at her she could look at his face. And she looked at it as though she had never seen it before, or with fresh-perceiving eyes. A very clever, rather tired face; superior, even haughty, self-sure; fastidious, dissatisfied, the face of one accustomed to choose sardonically between two evils; impatient, bitter; humorous, with hints of benevolence. She thought: "Of course he's never spoken to me because of his sister. Even *he* has to mind his p's and q's with her. And he's one that hates a fuss. Now she isn't here----"

She could not conceive what might be the "certain matter." She thrilled to learn it; but he would not be hurried. No, he would take his own time, Mr. Grig would. This was the most brilliant moment of her life.

He said, looking straight at her and forcing her to look straight at him:

"You know you've no business in a place like this, a girl like you. You're much too highly strung, for one thing. You aren't like Miss Jackson, for instance. You're simply wasting yourself here. Of course you're terribly independent, but you do try to please. I don't mean try to please merely in your work. You try to *please.* It's an instinct with you. Now in typing you'd never beat Miss Jackson. Miss Jackson's only alive, really, when she's typing. She types with her whole soul. You type

well--I hear--but that's only because you're clever all round. You'd do anything well. You'd milk cows just as well as you'd type. But your business is marriage, and a good marriage! You're beautiful, and, as I say, you have an instinct to please. That's the important thing. You'd make a success of marriage because of that and because you're adaptable and quick at picking up. Most women when they're married forget that their job is to adapt themselves and to please. That's their *job*. They expect to be kowtowed to and spoilt and humoured and to be free to spend money without having to earn it, and to do nothing in return except just exist--and perhaps manage a household, pretty badly. They seem to forget that there are two sides to a bargain. It's dashed hard work, pleasing is, sometimes. I know that. But it isn't so hard as earning money, believe me! Now you wouldn't be like the majority of women. You'd keep your share of the bargain, and handsomely. If you don't marry, and marry fifty miles above you, you'll be very silly. For you to stop here is an outrage against common-sense. It's merely monstrous. If I wasn't an old man I wouldn't tell you this, naturally. Now you needn't blush. I expect I'm not far off thirty years older than you--and you're young enough to be wise in time."

She was blushing tremendously, and in spite of an effort of courage her gaze dropped from his. At length his gaze shifted, on the pretext of dropping cigarette-ash very carefully into an ash-tray.

He had, then, been thinking about her all those months, differentiating her from the others, summing her up! And how well he had summed her up, and how well he had expressed himself--so romantically (somehow) and yet with such obvious truth! (Of course he had been having a dig at his own wife, who had divorced him! You could see how embittered he was on the subject of wives!) She wondered if he had thought her beautiful for long. Fancy him moving about the office and forming ideas about all of them, and never a sign, never the slightest sign that he could tell one of them from another! And he had chosen that night to reveal his mind to her. She was inexpressibly flattered. Because Mr. Grig was clearly a connoisseur--she had always felt that. If Mr. Grig considered her beautiful...!

And in fact she had an established assurance of beauty. She knew a good deal about herself. Proudly she reflected, amid her blushes, upon the image of her face and hair--the eyes that matched her hair, the perfectly formed ears, the softness of the chin and the firmness of the nose, the unchallengeable complexion, the dazzling teeth. She was simple enough to be somewhat apologetic about the largeness of her mouth, unaware that a man of experience flees from a small rose-bud mouth as from the devil, and that a large mouth is the certain sign of goodwill and understanding in a woman. She was apologetic, too, about the scragginess of her neck, and with better reason. But the wrists and the ankles, the legs, the

shoulders, the swelling of the hips, the truly astounding high, firm and abundant bosom! Beyond criticism! And she walked beautifully, throwing back her shoulders and so emphasizing the line of the waist at the back. She walked with her legs and hips, and the body swam forward above them. She had observed the effect thousands of times in street mirrors. The girls all admitted that she walked uniquely. Then, further, she had a smile (rarely used) which would intensify in the most extraordinary way the beauty of her face, lighting it, electrifying the eyes, radiating a charm that enraptured. She knew that also. A superlative physical pride rose up out of the subconscious into the conscious, and put her cheap pretty clothes to shame. It occurred to her that Mr. Grig had been talking very strangely, very unusually.

"I don't suppose I shall ever marry," she said plaintively. "How can I?" She meant, and without doubt he understood: "How can I possibly meet a man who is worth marrying?" She thought with destructive disdain of every youth who had ever reacted to her charm. The company at the dance she had missed seemed contemptible. They were still dancing. What a collection of tenth-rate fellows!

She became gloomy, pessimistic, as she saw the totality of her existence and its prospects. The home at Putney had been a prison. She had escaped from it, but only to enter another prison. She saw no outlet. She was trapped on every side. She could not break out of the infernal circle of poverty and of the conventions. Not in ten years could she save enough to keep her for a year. She had to watch every penny. If she was mad enough to go to a West End theatre she had to consider the difference between a half-crown and a three-shilling pit. Thousands of men and women negligently fling themselves into expensive taxis, but a rise in bus fares or Tube fares would seriously unbalance Lilian's budget. She passed most of her spare time in using a needle to set off her beauty, but what a farce was the interminable study and labour! She could not possibly aspire to even the best gloves; and as for the best stockings, or the second best!--the price of such a pair came to more than she could earn in a week. It was all absurd, tragic, pitiful. She had common-sense ample enough to see that her beauty was futile, her ambitions baseless, and her prospects nil. If she had been a vicious girl, she might have broken through the dreadful ring into splendours which she glimpsed and needed. But she was not vicious.

"Pooh!" exclaimed Mr. Grig impatiently. "You could marry anybody you liked if you put your mind to it."

And he spoke so scornfully of her lack of faith, so persuasively, so inspiringly, that she had an amazing and beautiful vision of herself worshipped, respected, alluring, seductive, arousing passion, reciprocating passion, kind, benevolent, eternally young, eternally lovely, eternally exercising for the balm and solace of mankind and a man the functions for which she was created and endowed-

-in a word, fulfilling herself. And for the moment, in the ecstasy of resolution to achieve the impossible, she was superb and magnificent and the finest thing that a man could ever hope to witness.

And she thought desperately:

"I'm twenty-three already. Time is rushing past me. To-morrow I shall be old."

After a silence Mr. Grig said:

"You're very tired. There's no reason why you shouldn't go home to bed."

"Indeed I shan't go home, Mr. Grig," she answered sharply, with grateful, eager devotion. "I shall stay. Supposing some work came in! It's not twelve o'clock yet."

She surprised quite a youthful look on Mr. Grig's face. Nearly thirty years older than herself? Ridiculous! There was nothing at all in a difference of years. Some men were never old. Back in the clerks' room she got out her vanity bag and carefully arranged her face. And as she looked in the glass she thought:

"After to-night I shall never be quite the same girl again.... Did he really call me in to ask me about the work, or did he only do it because he wanted to talk to me?"

IV
The Clubman

Lilian was confused by a momentary magnificent, vague vision of a man framed in the doorway of the small room. The door, drawn backwards from without, hid the vision. Then there was a cough. She realized with alarm that she had been asleep, or at least dozing, over her machine. In the fifth of a second she was wide awake and alert.

"Who's there?" she called, steadying her voice to a matter-of-fact and casual tone.

The door was pushed open, and the man who had been a vision entered.

"I beg your pardon," said he. "I wasn't sure whether it was the proper thing to come in here. I looked into another room, and had a glimpse of a gentleman who seemed to be rather dormant."

"This is the room to come to," said Lilian, with a prim counterfeit of a smile.

"The office is open?"

"Certainly."

As he advanced into the room the man took off the glossy silk hat which he was wearing at the far back of his head. He had an overcoat, but carried it on his left arm. He was tall and broad--something, indeed, in the nature of a giant--with a florid, smooth face; aged perhaps thirty-three. He had a way of pinching his lips together and pressing his lower jaw against his high collar, thus making a false double chin or so; the result was to produce an effect of wise and tolerant good-humour, as of one who knew humanity and who while prepared for surprises was not going to judge us too harshly. He was in full evening-dress, and his clothes were superb. They glistened; they fitted without a crease. The vast curve of the gleaming stiff shirt-front sloped perfect in its contour; the white waistcoat was held round the stupendous form by three topaz buttons; from somewhere beneath the waistcoat a gold chain emerged and vanished somewhere into the hinterland of his person. The stout white kid gloves were thickly ridged on the backs and fitted the broad hands as well as the coat fitted the body--it was inconceivable that they had not been made to measure as everything else must have been made to measure. The man would have been overdressed had he not worn his marvellous and costly garments with absolute naturalness and simplicity.

Lilian thought:

"He must be a man-about-town, a clubman, the genuine article."

She was impressed, secretly flustered, and very anxious to meet him as an equal on his own ground of fine manners. She divined that, having entered the room once and fairly caught her asleep, he had had the good taste to withdraw and cough and make a new entry in order to spare her modesty; and she was softly appreciative, while quite determined to demonstrate by her demeanour that she had not been asleep.

She thought:

"Gertie Jackson wouldn't have known where to look, in my place."

Still, despite her disdain of Gertie Jackson's deportment, she felt herself to be terribly unproficient in the social art.

"Is it anything urgent?" she asked.

"Well, it is a bit urgent."

He had a strong, full, pleasant voice.

"Won't you sit down?"

"Thanks."

He sat down, disposing his hat by the side of her machine, and his overcoat on another chair, and drawing off his gloves.

Lilian waited like a cat to pounce upon the slightest sign of familiarity and kill it; for she had understood that men-about-town regarded girl typists as their quarry and as nothing else. But there was no least lapse from deferential pro-

priety; the clubman might have been in colloquy with his sister's friend--and his sister listening in the next room. He pulled a manuscript from his breast-pocket, and, after a loving glance at it, offered it to her.

"I've only just written it," said he. "And I want to take it round to the *Evening Standard* office myself in the morning before 8.30. The editor's an acquaintance of mine and I might get it into to-morrow afternoon's paper. In fact, it must be to-morrow or never--because of the financial debate in the House, you see. Topical. I wonder whether you'd be good enough to do it for me."

"Let me see," said Lilian professionally. "About fifteen hundred words, or hardly. Oh, yes! I will do it myself."

"That's very kind of you. Will you mind looking at the writing? Do you think you'll be able to make it out? I was at a bit of a jolly to-night, and my hand's never too legible."

Without glancing further at the manuscript, Lilian answered:

"It's our business to make out writing."

Suddenly she gave him her full smile.

"I suppose it is," he said, also smiling. "Now shall I call for the copy about 8 o'clock?"

"I'm afraid the office won't be open at 8 o'clock," said Lilian. "We close at 6.30 for an hour or two. But what's the address? Is it anywhere near here?"

"6a Jermyn Street. You'll see it all on the back of the last page."

"It could be delivered--dropped into your letter-box--by 6.30 this morning, and you could take it out of the box any time after that." The idea seemed to have spontaneously presented itself to her. She forbore to say that her intention was to deliver the copy herself on her way home.

"But this is most awfully obliging of you!" he exclaimed.

"Not at all. You see, we specialize in urgent things…. We charge double for night-work, I ought to tell you--in fact, three shillings a thousand, with a minimum."

"Of course! Of course! I quite understand that. Perhaps you'll put the bill in the envelope." He drew forth a watch that looked like a gold half-crown. "Two o'clock. And I can count on it being in the letter-box at six-thirty."

"Absolutely."

"Well, all I say is, it's very wonderful."

She smiled again: "It's just our business."

He bowed gracefully in departing.

As soon as he was gone she looked at the back of the last page. "Lord Mackworth." Never having heard of such a lord, she consulted the office *Who's Who*. Yes, he was there. "Mackworth, Lord. See Fermanagh, Earl of." She turned to the F pages. He was the *e.s.* of the Earl of Fermanagh. *E.s.* meant eldest son, she

assumed. One day he would be an earl. She was thrilled.

Eagerly she read the manuscript before starting to copy it. The subject was the fall in the exchange value of the French franc. "Abstruse," she called it to herself. Frightfully learned! Yet the article was quite amusing to read. In one or two places it was almost funny enough to make her laugh. And Lord Mackworth illustrated his points by the prices of commodities and pleasure at Monte Carlo. Evidently he had just returned from Monte Carlo. What a figure! He had everything--title, blood, wealth, style, a splendid presence, perfect manners; he was intellectual, he was clever, he was political, he wrote for the Press. And withal he was a man of pleasure, for he had been to Monte Carlo, and that very night he had taken part in a "jolly"--whatever a jolly was!

No! He was not married; it was impossible that he should be married. But naturally he must keep mistresses. They always kept mistresses. Though what a man like him could see in that sort of girl passed Lilian. "You could marry *anybody* you liked if you put your mind to it," Mr. Grig had said. Absurdly, horribly untrue! How, for instance, could she set about to marry Lord Mackworth? She was for ever imprisoned; she could not possibly, by any device, break through the transparent, invisible, adamantine walls that surrounded her. Beautiful, was she? Gifts, had she? Well, she had sat opposite this lord, close to him, in a room secure from interruption, in the middle of the night. She had been obliging. And he had not been sufficiently interested to swerve by a hair's breadth from his finished and nonchalant formal politeness. Her rôle in relation to Lord Mackworth was to tap out his clever article on the old Underwood and to deliver it herself in the chilly darkness of the morning before going exhausted to her miserable lodging! She, lovely! She, burning with ambition! ... The visit of the man of title and of parts was like an act of God to teach her the realities of her situation and the dangerous folly of dreams.

She tiptoed out of the room to see if Mr. Grig really was asleep as Lord Mackworth had suggested. She hoped that he was unconscious and that the visit was her secret. Either he was very soundly asleep or the stir of the arrival and departure must have awakened him. If he was awake she would pretend that she wanted to inform him of the job just come in, since he had previously enquired about the course of business. If not, she would say nothing of the affair--merely enter up the job in the night-book, and wait for any inquiries that might be made before opening her mouth.

Through the door ajar Mr. Grig could be seen fast asleep in his padded chair. His lower jaw had fallen, revealing a mouth studded with precious metal. He was generally spry, in his easy-going manner, and often had quite a youthful air, but now there could be no mistake about his age, which according to Lilian's standard of age was advanced. To Lilian forty was oldish, fifty quite old, and

sixty venerable. What a contrast between the fresh, brilliant, authentic youth of Lord Mackworth and the imitation juvenility of Mr. Grig even at his spryest! The souvenir of Lord Mackworth's physical individuality made the sight of Mr. Grig almost repellent. She was divided from Mr. Grig by the greatest difference in the world, the difference between one generation and another.

She crept back, resolving to accomplish the finest piece of typescript that had ever been done in the office. Had she not brains to surpass Gertie Jackson at anything if she chose to try? Just as she was entering her own room the outer door of the office opened. More urgent work! It was Lord Mackworth again. She stood stock-still in the doorway, her head thrown back and turned towards him, her body nearly within the room. Agitated by a sudden secret anticipation, by a pleasure utterly unhoped for, she gave him a nervous, welcoming, enquiring smile, a smile without reserve, and full of the confidence due to one who had proved at once his reliability and his attractiveness. She had a feeling towards him as towards an old friend. She knew that her face was betraying her joy, but she did not care, because she trusted him; and, moreover, it would in any case have been impossible for her to hide her joy.

"There's just one thing," began Lord Mackworth in a cautious whisper, though previously he had put no restraint on his powerful voice, and paused.

"Will you come in?" she invited him, also in a whisper, and moved quickly from his line of sight. He followed her, and having entered her room softly shut the door, which at the previous interview had remained half open.

"Will you sit down?"

They both sat down in their original positions. Yes, they were like friends. More, they were like conspirators. Why? What would the next moment disclose? It seemed to her that the next moment must unfold into an unpredictable, beautiful blossom such as nobody had ever seen. She was intensely excited. She desired ardently that he should ask her to help him in some matter in which she alone could help him. She was a touching, wistful spectacle. All her defences had sunk away. He could not but see that he had made a conquest, that the city of loveliness had fallen into his hands.

"It just occurred to me--please tell me if I'm being indiscreet--that perhaps you wouldn't mind doing me a little service. I may oversleep myself in the morning, and I can't get at my man now. Would you mind giving me a ring up on the 'phone about six o'clock? You see, I have the telephone by my bed, and it would be sure to wake me--especially if you told the operator to keep on ringing. It's very necessary I should run along to the newspaper office and see the editor personally as soon as he gets there. Otherwise I might be done in. Of course, I could sit up for the rest of the night----" He laughed shortly.

Nearly opposite the end of Clifford Street, in Bond Street, was a hosier's

shop with the royal arms over the entrance and half a dozen pairs of rich blue-and-crimson pyjamas--and nothing else--displayed in the window against a chaste background of panelled acacia wood. Lilian saw a phantasm of her client's lordly chamber, with the bed and the telephone by the bed, and the great form of the man himself recumbent and moveless, gloriously and imperfectly covered in a suit of the blue-and-crimson pyjamas. She heard the telephone bell ring--ring--ring--ring--ring--ring, pertinaciously. The figure did not stir. Ring--ring--ring--ring! At last the figure stirred, turned over, half sat up, seized the telephone, which, pacified, ceased to ring, and the figure listened--to her voice! It was her voice that was heard in the chamber.... The most sharply masculine hallucination that she had ever had, perhaps the only one. It moved her to the point of fright. The whole house might have rocked under her--rocked once, and then resumed its firmness. She felt faint, terror-struck, and excruciatingly, inexplicably happy. And she was ashamed; she was shocked by the mystery of herself. Flushing, she bent her face over the desk.

"Perhaps I'd better sit up all night," Lord Mackworth added apologetically.

"What's your number?" she asked in a low voice, not looking up.

"Regent 1067."

"Regent 1067," she repeated the number, even writing it on her note pad.

"You're really awfully kind. I hesitated to suggest it. I do hope you'll forgive me."

She looked up quickly, and into his eyes.

"I shall be delighted to give you a ring," she said, with sweet, smiling eagerness. "It's no trouble at all. None at all, I assure you."

She was the divine embodiment of the human and specially feminine desire to please, to please charmingly, to please completely, to please with the whole force and beauty of her individuality. The poor boy must get a few hours' sleep. A man needed sleep; sleep was important to him. As for her, the woman's task was to watch and work, and when the moment came she would wake the man--the child--who was incapable of waking himself.

"Well, thanks ever so much." He rose.

"I suppose you don't want a carbon of your article as well?" she suggested.

"It's an idea," he agreed. "You never know. I think I will have a carbon."

As he was leaving he said abruptly: "Do you know, I imagine I've seen you before--somewhere."

"I don't think so." She did not quite like this remark of his. It seemed to her to be a commonplace device for prolonging the interview; it shook her faith in his probity.

But he insisted, nodding his head.

"Yes. In Bond Street. I remember you were wearing an exceedingly pretty

hat, with some yellow flowers in it."

She was dumbfounded, for she did possess a pretty hat with yellow flowers in it. She had done him an injustice. Fancy him noticing her, admiring, remembering! It was incredible. She must have made a considerable impression on him. She smiled her repentance for having doubted his probity even for a moment.

"You must have a very good memory," she said, in her gaze an exquisite admission of his rightness.

"Oh! I have!"

They shook hands. In holding out her hand she drew back her body. She had absurdly hoped that he would offer to shake hands, not really expecting him to do so. He departed with unimpeachable correctness and composure. What nice discretion he had shown in not referring earlier to the fact that her face was not unknown to him! Most men would have contrived to work it in at the very beginning of the conversation. But he had actually gone away, the first time, without mentioning it.

Lilian was left in such a state of exaltation that she could not immediately start to work. She was ecstatically inspired with a resolution, far transcending all previous yearnings of a similar nature, to fulfil herself, to be herself utterly, to bring her gifts to fruition despite all obstacles and all impossibilities. It was not that she desired to please Lord Mackworth (though she passionately desired to please him), nor to achieve luxury and costliness and elegance and a highly refined way of life. These things, however important and delectable, were merely the necessary incidentals to the supreme end of exploiting her beauty, charm and benevolence so that in old age she would not have to say, "I might have been."

V
The Devotee

It was after she had made some tea and was taking it, at her desk, without milk, but with a bun and a half left over from the previous afternoon's orgy of the small room clerks, that Lilian had the idea of a mighty and scarcely conceivable transgression, crime, depredation. None of the machines in the small room was in quite first-rate order. The machines were good, but they needed adjustment. Miss G.--the clerks referred to her as Miss G., instead of Miss Grig, when they were critical

of her, which was often--was almost certainly a just woman, but she was mean, especially in the matter of wages; and she would always postpone rather too long the summoning of a mechanic to overhaul the typewriters. Such delay was, of course, disadvantageous to the office, but Miss G. was like that. Lilian, munching, inserted two sheets and a new carbon into her machine, and then pulled them out again with a swift swish. Why should she not abstract Miss G.'s own machine for the high purpose of typing Lord Mackworth's brilliant article? It was nearly a new one.

Miss G. was a first-rate typist. She typed all her own letters, and regularly at night even did copying; and she always had the star machine of the office. The one objection to Lilian's nefarious scheme was the fact that Miss G.'s machine ranked as the Ark of the Covenant, and the rule forbidding the profane to lay hands on it was absolute and awful. This rule was a necessity in the office, where every machine amounted to an individuality, and was loved or hated and shamelessly intrigued for or against. Lilian knew a little of Miss G.'s machine, for on Its purchase she had had the honour of trying it and reinforcing Miss G.'s favourable judgment upon it, her touch being lighter than Gertie Jackson's, that amiable, tedious hack, and similar to Miss G.'s touch.

Lilian feared lest her own machine might give a slip towards the end of a page, throw a line out of the straight and spoil the whole page. Miss G.'s machine was on the small desk beneath the window in the principals' room. Having reflected, she decided to sin. If Mr. Grig was awake she would tell him squarely that her own machine was out of gear, that all the clerks' machines were out of gear, and if he still objected--and he might, for he ever feared Miss G.--she would bewitch him. She would put his own theory of her powers into practice upon himself.

She would be quite unscrupulous; she would stop at nothing. She went forth excited on her raid. He was still asleep. He might waken; if he did, so much the worse; she must risk it. She regarded him with friendly condescension. She had work to do; she had a sense of responsibility; and she was doing the work. He, theoretically in charge of the office, slept, probably after a day chiefly idle--the grey-haired, charming, useless irresponsible. And were not all men asleep rather absurd? She picked up the heavy machine; one of its indiarubber shoes dropped off, but she left that where it lay--there were plenty to replace it in her room. Soundlessly she left the sleeper. Triumphant, unscrupulous, reckless, she did not care what might happen.

At work on the article, exulting in the smooth excellence of Miss G.'s machine, she felt strangely happy. She liked Felix to be asleep; she liked the obscure sensation of fatigue at the back of her brain; she liked to be alone in the night, amid a resting or roystering world; she liked the tension of concentrating on the

work, the effort after perfection. The very machine itself, and the sounds of the machine, the feel of the paper, the faint hiss of the gas-stove, were all friendly and helpful. How different were her sensations then from her sensations in the pother and racket and friction of the daytime! She forgot that she was beautiful and born to enchant. She was oblivious of both the past and the future. A moral exaltation, sweet and gentle, inspired, upheld and exhilarated her.

She heard the outer door open. The threatened interruption annoyed her almost to exasperation. It was essential that she should not be interrupted, for she was like a poet in full flow of creation. Footsteps, someone moving hesitatingly to and fro in the anteroom! There was the word "Enquiries" painted in black on the glass panel of the small room, thrown into relief by the light within the room, and people had not the sense to see it. The public was really extraordinary. Even Lord Mackworth had not at first noticed it. Well, let whoever it might be find his way about unaided by her! She would not budge. If urgent work had arrived she did not want it, could not do it, and would not have it.

Then she caught voices. The visitor had got into the principals' room and wakened Mr. Grig. The voices were less audible now, but a conversation seemingly interminable was proceeding in the principals' room. The suspense vexed her and interfered with the fine execution of her task. She sighed, tapped her foot, and made sounds of protest with her tongue against her upper teeth. At length both Mr. Grig and the visitor emerged into the ante-room, still tirelessly gabbling. The visitor went, banging the outer door. Mr. Grig came into her room with a manuscript in his hand. Feigning absorption, she did not look up.

"Here's something wanted for eleven in the morning. It's going to be called for. Proof of a witness's evidence in a law case. Very urgent. It's pretty long. You'd better get on to it at once. Then one or two of them'll be able to finish it between nine and eleven."

Lilian accused him in her mind of merely imitating his sister's methods of organization and partition.

"I'm afraid I can't put this aside, Mr. Grig," she said gravely, uncompromisingly.

"What is it?"

"It's just come in."

"I never heard anybody," Felix snapped.

Lilian thought how queer and how unjust it was that she should be prevented by her inferior station from turning on him and bluntly informing him that he had been asleep instead of managing the office.

"It's an article by Lord Mackworth for to-morrow's *Evening Standard*, and it has to be at the *Standard* office by half-past eight, and I've promised to have it delivered at Jermyn Street by six-thirty."

"But who's going to deliver it?"

"I am, as I go home."

"But this is urgent too. And, what's more, I've definitely promised it," Mr. Grig protested, waving his manuscript somewhat forlornly. "What length's yours?"

"It's not the length. It has to be done with the greatest care."

"Yes, that's all very well, but----"

His attitude of helplessness touched her. She smiled in her serious manner.

"If you'll leave it to me to see to, Mr. Grig," she said soothingly, and yet a little superiorly, "I'll do the best I can. I'll start it, anyhow. And I'll leave an urgent note for Miss Jackson about it. After all, in two hours they ought to be able to do almost anything, and you know how reliable Miss Jackson is. Miss Grig always relies on her."

She held out her hand for the wretched manuscript. Mr. Grig yielded it up, pretending unwillingness and uneasiness, but in reality much relieved. A quarter of an hour later he returned to her room in overcoat and hat.

"I think I may as well go home now," said he, yawning enormously. "I'm a bit anxious about my sister. Nothing else likely to come in, is there? You'll be all right, I suppose."

"*Me!*" she exclaimed kindly. "Of *course*, Mr. Grig. I shall be perfectly all right."

She wondered whether he really was anxious about his sister. At any rate, he had not the stamina to sit up through all the night in the office. But she, Lilian, had. She was delighted to be alone again. She finished Lord Mackworth's article, read it and re-read it. Not a mistake. She bound it and stitched it. She entered the item in the night-book. She made out the bill. She typed the address on the envelope. Then, before fastening the envelope, she read through everything again. All these things she did with the greatest deliberation and nicety.

At the end she had ample time to make a start on the other work, but she could not or would not bring herself to the new task. She was content to write a note for Gertie Jackson, shifting all the responsibility on to Gertie. Gertie would have to fly round and make the others fly round. And if the work was late--what then? Lilian did not care. Her conscience seemed to have exhausted itself. She sat in a blissful trance. She recalled with satisfaction that she had said nothing to Felix about Lord Mackworth having called in person. She rose and wandered about the rooms, savouring the silent solitude. The telephone was in the principals' room.

How awkward that might have been if Felix had stayed! But he had not stayed.

VI
The Telephone

"Hello, hello! Who is it?"

"Is that Regent 1067?"

"Yes."

"Is that Lord Mackworth?"

"Speaking. Who is it?"

"Grig's Typewriting Office. I'm so sorry to wake you up, but you asked us to. It's just past six o'clock."

"Thanks very much. Who is it speaking?"

"Grig's Typewriting Office."

"Yes. But *your* name? Miss--Miss----?"

"Oh! I see. Share. Share. Lilian Share.... Not Spare, S-*h*-a-r-e."

"I've got it. Share. I recognized your voice, Miss Share. Well, it's most extraordinarily good-natured of you. Most. I can't thank you enough. Excuse me asking your name. I only wanted it so that I could thank you personally. Article finished?"

"It's all finished and ready to be delivered. It'll be dropped into your letter-box in about a quarter of an hour from now. You can rely on that."

"Then do you keep messengers hanging about all night for these jobs?"

"I'm going to deliver it myself; then I shall know it is delivered."

"D'you know, I half suspected all along you meant to do that. You oughtn't really to put yourself to so much trouble. I don't know how to thank you. I don't, really!"

"It's no trouble at all. It's on my way home."

"You're just going home, then? You must be very tired."

"Oh, no! I sleep in the daytime."

"Well, I hope you'll have a good *day's* rest." A laugh.

"And *I* hope now I've wakened you you won't turn over and go to sleep again." Another laugh, from the same end.

"No fear! I'm up now."

"I beg your pardon?"

"I'm up. Out of bed." A laugh from the Clifford Street end.

"Good-bye, then."

"Good-bye. And thanks again. By the way, you're putting the bill with it?"

"Oh, yes."

"And the carbon?"

"Yes. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Miss Share."

Lilian hung up the receiver, smiling. And she continued to smile as she left the room and went to her own room and took her street things out of the cupboard and put them on. Nothing could have been more banal, more ordinary, and nothing more exquisite and romantic than the telephone conversation. The secret charm of it was inexplicable to her.... She saw him standing in the blue-and-crimson pyjamas by the bedside, a form distinguished and powerful.... She revelled in his gratitude. How nice of him to ask her name so that he might thank her personally! He did not care to thank a nameless employee. He wanted to thank *somebody*. And now she was somebody to him.

Perhaps she had not been well-advised to give him her Christian name. The word, however, had come out of itself. Moreover, she liked her Christian name, and she liked nice people to know it. She certainly ought not to have said "that" about his not turning over and going to sleep again. No. There was something "common" in it. But he had accepted the freedom in the right spirit, had not taken advantage of it.

She extinguished the gas-stove, restored the stolen typewriter, loosed the catch of the outer door, banged the door after her, and descended, holding the foolscap envelope in her shabbily-gloved hand. The forsaken solitude of the office was behind her.

Outside, an icy mist floated over wet pavements in the first dim, sinister unveiling of the London day! Lilian wore a thick, broad, woollen scarf which comforted her neck and bosom, and gave to beholders the absurd illusion that she was snugly enveloped; but the assaulting cold took her in the waist, and she shivered. Her feet began to feel damp immediately. There was the old watchman peeping out of his sentry-box by his glowing brazier! He recognized her quickly enough, and without a movement of the gnarled face held up her matchbox as a sign of the bond between them. How ridiculous to have classed him with burglars! She threw her head back and gave him a proud, bright and rather condescendingly gracious smile.

Along Clifford Street and all down Bond Street the heaped dustbins stood on the kerb waiting for the scavengers. In Piccadilly several Lyons' horse-vans, painted in Oxford and Cambridge blues, trotted sturdily eastwards; one of them

was driven by a woman, wrapped in a great macintosh and perched high aloft with a boy beside her. Nothing else moving in the thoroughfare! The Ritz Hotel, formidable fortress of luxury, stood up arrogant like a Florentine palace, hiding all its costly secrets from the scorned mob. No. 6a Jermyn Street was just round the corner from St. James's Street: a narrow seven-storey building of flats, with a front-door as impassive and meaningless as the face of a footman. Lilian hesitated a moment and relinquished her packet into the brass-bordered letter-slit. She heard it fall. She turned away with a jerky gesture. She had not walked ten yards when a frightful lassitude and dejection attacked her with the suddenness of cholera. Scarcely could she command her limbs to move. The ineffable sadness, hopelessness, wretchedness, vanity of existence washed over her and beat her down. Only a very few could be glorious, and she was not and never could be of the few. She was shut out from brightness,--no better than a ragamuffin looking into a candy window.

She descended into the everlasting lamplit night of the Tube at Dover Street, where there was no dawn and no sunset. And all the employees, and all the meek, preoccupied travellers seemed to be her brothers and sisters in martyrdom. Her train was nearly empty; but the eastbound trains--train after train--were full of pathetic midgets urgently engaged upon the problem of making both ends meet. After Earl's Court the train ran up an incline into the whitening day. She got out at the next station, conveniently near to which she lodged.

The house was one of the heavily porched erections of the 'fifties and 'sixties, much fallen in prestige. The dirty kitchenmaid was giving the stone floor of the porch a lick and a promise, so that fortunately the front door stood open. Lilian had the tiny mean bedroom on the second floor over the hall; in New York it would have been termed a hall-bedroom. Nobody except the gawky, frowsy, stupid, good-natured maid had seen her. She shut her door and locked it. The room was colder even than the street. She looked into the mirror, which was so small that she had had to arrange a descending series of nails for it in order that piece by piece she might inspect the whole of herself. Her face was as pale as a corpse. Undressing and piling half her wardrobe on to the counterpane she slipped into the narrow bed, ravenous for sleep and oblivion, and drew the clothes right over her head. In an instant she was in a paradise of divine dreams.

PART II

I
The Suicide

The next morning Lilian left her lodging at the customary hour of 8.15, to join one of the hundreds of hastening, struggling, preoccupied processions of workers that converged upon central London. She had slept for ten hours without a break on the previous day, risen hungry to a confused and far too farinaceous tea, done some dressmaking by the warmth of an oil-stove, and gone to bed again for another enormous period of heavy slumber. She was well refreshed; her complexion was restored to its marvellous perfectness; and life seemed simpler, more promising, and more agreeably exciting than usual.

She had convinced herself that the Irish lord would call at the office in person to pay his bill; the mysterious and yet thoroughly understood code that governs certain human relations would forbid him either to post a cheque or to send his man with the money. Her only fear was that he might already have called. But even if he had already called, he would call and call again, on one good pretext or another, until ... Anyhow they would meet.... And so on, according to the inconsequent logic of day-dreams in the everlasting night of the Tube.

The dreamer had a seat in the train--one of the advantages of living near the terminus--but strap-hangers of both sexes swayed in clusters over her, and along the whole length of the car, and both the platforms were too densely populated. She could not read; nobody could read. As the train roared and shook through Down Street station, she jumped up to fight her way through straphangers towards the platform, in readiness to descend at Dover Street. On these early trains carrying serious people, if you sat quiet until the train came to your station you would assuredly be swept on to the next station. These trains taught you to meet the future half-way.

As it happened the train stopped about a hundred yards short of Dover Street, and would not move on. Seconds and minutes passed, and the stoppage became undeniably a breakdown. The tunnels under the earth from Dover Street back to Hammersmith were full of stopped trains a few hundred yards apart, and every train was full of serious people who positively had to be at a certain place at a certain time. Lilian's mood changed; the mood of the car changed, and of the train and of all the trains. No one knew anything; no one could do anything; the trains were each a prison. The railway company by its officials maintained a masterly silence as to the origin of the vast inconvenience and calamity. Rumours were born by spontaneous generation. A man within Lilian's hearing, hitherto one of God's quite minor achievements, was suddenly gifted with divination and

announced that the electricians at the power station in Lots Road had gone on strike without notice and every electric train in London had been paralysed. Half an hour elapsed. The prisoners, made desperate by the prospect of the fate which attended them, spoke of revolution and homicide, well aware that they were just as capable of these things as a flock of sheep. Then, as inexplicably as it had stopped, the train started.

Two minutes later Lilian, with some scores of other girls, was running madly through Dover Street in vain pursuit of time lost and vanished. Not a soul had guessed the cause of the disaster, which, according to the evening papers, was due to an old, unhappy man who had wandered unobserved into the tunnel from Dover Street station with the ambition to discover for himself what the next world was like. This ambition had been gratified.

As Lilian, in a state of nervous exhaustion, flew on tired wings up the office stairs she of course had to compose herself into a semblance of bright, virginal freshness for the day's work, conformably with the employer's theory that until he reaches the office the employee has done and suffered nothing whatever. And Miss Grig was crossing the ante-room at the moment of Lilian's entry.

"You're twenty-five minutes late, Miss Share," said Miss Grig coldly. She looked very ill.

"So sorry, Miss Grig," Lilian answered with unprotesting humility, and offered no explanation.

Useless to explain! Useless to assert innocence and victimization! Excuses founded on the vagaries of trains were unacceptable in that office, as in thousands of offices. Employers refused to take the least interest in trains or other means of conveyance. One of the girls in the room called "the large room" had once told Lilian that, living at Ilford, she would leave home on foggy mornings at six o'clock in order to be sure of a prompt arrival in Clifford Street at nine o'clock, thus allowing three hours for little more than a dozen miles. But only in the book of doomsday was this detail entered to her credit. Miss Grig, even if she had heard of it--which she had not--would have dismissed it as of no importance. Yet Miss Grig was a just woman.

"Come into my room, Miss Share, will you, please?" said Miss Grig.

Lilian, apprehending she knew not what, thought to herself bitterly that lateness for a delicious shopping appointment or a heavenly appointment to lunch at the Savoy or to motor up the river--affairs of true importance--would have been laughed off as negligible, whereas lateness at this filthy office was equivalent to embezzlement. And she resolved anew, and with the most terrible determination, to escape at no matter what risks from the servitude and the famine of sentiment

in which she existed.

II
The Malady

Miss Grig's Christian name was Isabel; it was somehow secret, and never heard in the office; and Felix, if he ever employed it, could only have done so in the sacred privacy of the principals' room. Like her brother, Miss Grig might have been almost any age, but only the malice of a prisonful of women could have seriously asserted her to be older than Felix. Although by general consent an authentic virgin, she had not the air of one. Rather full in figure, she was neither desiccated nor stiff, and when she moved her soft body took on flowing curves, so that clever and experienced observers could not resist the inference, almost certainly wrong, that in the historic past of Isabel lay hidden some Sabine episode or sublime folly of self-surrender. She had black hair, streaked with grey, and marvellous troubled, smouldering black eyes that seemed to yearn and appeal. And yet in an occasional gesture and tone she would become masculine.

She went wrong in the matter of clothes, aspiring after elegance and missing it through a fundamental lack of distinction, and also through inability to concentrate her effects. Her dresses consisted of ten thousand details held together by no unity of conception. Thin gold chains wandered, apparently purposeless, over her rich form; they would disappear like a railway in a cutting and then pop out unexpectedly in another part of the lush rolling countryside. The contours of her visible garments gave the impression that the concealed system of underskirts, cache-corsets, corsets, lingerie, hose and suspenders was of the most complicated, innumerable and unprecedented variety. And indeed she was one of those women who, for the performance of the morning and the evening rites, trebly secure themselves by locks and bolts and blinds from the slightest chance of a chance of the peril of the world's gaze.

The purchase of the typewriting business by Felix had changed Miss Grig's life from top to bottom. It had transformed her from a relic festering in sloth and frustration into the eager devotee of a sane and unassailable cult. The business was her perversity, her passion. It was her mystic husband, fecundating her with vital juices, the spouse to whom she joyously gave long nights of love. Apart from the business, and possibly her brother, she had no real thoughts. The concern as

it existed in Lilian's time was her creation. She would sacrifice anything to it, her own health and life, even the lives and health of tender girls. Yes, and she would sacrifice her conscience to it. She would cheat for it. The charges for typewriting were high--for she had established a tradition of the highest-class work and rates to match--but this did not prevent her from seizing any excuse to inflate the bills. The staff said that her malpractices sufficed every year to pay the rent. And she was never more priestess-like, more lofty and grandiose, than when falsifying an account.

Lilian found her seated alone in fluent dignity at the great desk.

"Yes, Miss Grig?"

"May I enquire," asked Miss Grig in grave accents not of reproach but of pain, "why you did not put in an appearance yesterday, Miss Share?"

"Well, madam," Lilian answered with surprise and gentle rebuttal, "I stayed here all the night before and I was so tired I slept all day. I didn't wake up until it would have been too late to come."

"But you knew I was unwell, and that I should count on you upper girls to fill my place. Or you should have known. What if you *were* tired? You are young and strong; you could have stood it easily enough, and there was much work to be done. In a crisis we don't think about being tired. We just keep on. And even if you did sleep all day, I suppose it never occurred to you in the evening that someone would be needed to take charge during last night. The least you could have done would have been to run up and see how things were. But no! You didn't even do that! Shall I tell you who did take charge last night? Miss Jackson. She'd been on duty the whole day yesterday. She stayed all night till six o'clock. And she was back again at nine o'clock this morning--twenty-five minutes before you. And when I told her to go back home, she positively refused. She defied me. That's what I call the true spirit, my dear Lilian."

Miss Grig ceased; only her lustrous reproachful eyes continued the harangue. She had shown no anger. She had appealed to Miss Share's best instincts.

The address "my dear Lilian" caused misgivings in the employee's bosom. Lilian knew that it was Felix and not Miss Grig who had admitted her to employment, and that Miss Grig had been somewhat opposed to the engagement. She also guessed that Miss Grig objected to her good looks, and was always watchful for an occasion to illustrate her theory that a girl might be too good-looking. And the tone of the words "my dear Lilian" had menace in its appealing, sad sweetness. Miss Grig had been known to deviate without warning into frightful inclemency, and she always implacably got the last ounce out of her girls.

The culprit offered no defence. There was no defence. Assuredly she ought to have run up on the previous evening. Miss Grig had spoken truth--the notion of running up had simply not occurred to the preoccupied Lilian. Nevertheless,

while saying naught, she kept thinking resentfully: "Here I worked over twenty hours on end and this is my reward--a slating! This is my reward--a nice old slating!" With fallen face and drooping lower lip she moved to leave. She was ready to cry.

"And there's something else, Miss Share. Now please don't cry. When Mr. Grig came up the night before last to tell you that I was unwell, you ought not to have allowed him to stay. You know that he can't stand night-work. Men are not like us women----"

"But how could I possibly----" Lilian interrupted, quite forgetting the impulse to cry.

"You should have seen that he left again at once. It would have been quite easy--especially for a girl like you. The result is that he's been a wreck ever since. It seems he stayed till four o'clock and after. I tried my best to stop him from coming at all; but he would come.... Please, please, think over what I've said. Thank you."

Lilian felt all the soft, cruel, unopposable force of Miss Grig's individuality. She vaguely and with inimical deference comprehended the secret of Miss Grig's success in business. Youth and beauty and charm, qualities so well appreciated by Felix, so rich in promise for Lilian, were absolutely powerless against the armour of Miss Grig. To Miss Grig Lilian was no better than a cross-eyed, flat-bosomed spinster of thirty-nine. Not a bit better! Perhaps worse! Miss Grig actually had the assurance to preach to Lilian the nauseous and unnatural doctrine that men are by right entitled to the protection and self-sacrifice of women.

Moreover, Miss Grig, without knowing it, had convinced Lilian that her ideas concerning Lord Mackworth were the hallucinations of an excessively silly and despicable kind of brain. And even if Lord Mackworth did playfully attempt to continue the divertissement begun in the romantic night, Miss Grig by the sureness of her perceptions and the bland pitilessness of her tactics would undoubtedly counter him once and for all. The two women, so acutely contrasted in age, form and temperament, had this in common--that they secretly and unwillingly respected each other. But the younger was at present no match at all for the elder.

And yet Lilian was not cast down--neither by the realization of her awful silliness and of her lack of the sense of responsibility, nor by her powerlessness, nor by the awaking from the dream of Lord Mackworth. On the contrary, she was quite uplifted and agreeably excited, and her brain was working on lines of which Miss Grig had absolutely no notion whatever. Miss Grig, obviously truthful, had said that she had tried to prevent her brother from coming to the office on the last night but one. Miss Grig had been ready enough to let Lilian stay till morning without a word. But Felix had told Lilian that he had come to the office to warn

her at his sister's urgent request. Why had Felix lied?

The answer clearly was that he had had a fancy to chat with Lilian alone, without Lilian suspecting his fancy. And in fact he had chatted with Lilian alone, and to some purpose.... The answer was that Felix was genuinely interested in Lilian. Further, Miss Grig suspected this interest. If Gertie Jackson had happened to be on duty that evening, would Miss Grig have opposed her brother's coming? She would not. Finally, Miss Grig herself had confessed, perhaps unthinkingly, that Lilian was not without influential attributes. The phrase "especially for a girl like you" shone in the girl's mind.

She went into the small room, which was at the moment empty. The cover had not been removed from her own machine, but the other two machines were open, and Millicent's was ammunitioned with paper. Lilian could hear Milly, who shared the small room with herself and Gertie Jackson, dividing work and giving instructions in an important, curt voice to the mere rabble of girls in the large room. To Lilian's practised sense there was throughout the office an atmosphere of nervous disturbance and unease. Mr. Grig being absent, she felt sure that before the end of the day--probably just about tea-time--the electrical fluid would concentrate itself in one spot and then explode in a tense, violent, bitter and yet only murmured scene between two of the girls in the large room--unless, of course, she herself and Millicent happened to get across one another.

She took off her things and put them in the clothes cupboard. Gertie's hat and jacket were absent, which meant that Gertie was already out somewhere on the firm's business. Millicent's precious boa was present instead of her thick scarf, which meant that Millicent was to meet at night the insufferably pert young man from the new branch of Lloyds Bank in Bond Street. The pert young man would dine Millicent at the Popular Café in Piccadilly, where for as little as five shillings two persons might have a small table to themselves, the aphrodisiac of music, and the ingenuous illusion of seeing Life with a capital. Now Lilian never connected Life with anything less than the Savoy, the Carlton, and the Ritz. Lilian had been born with a sure instinct in these high matters. She looked at the contents of the clothes-cupboard and despised them, furiously--and in particular Millicent's boa; anybody could see what that was; it would not deceive even a bank clerk. Not that Lilian possessed any article of attire to surpass the boa in intrinsic worth! She did not. But she felt no envy in regard to the boa, and indeed never envied any girl the tenth-rate--no, nor the second-rate! Her desire was for the best or nothing; she could not compromise. The neighbouring shop-windows had effectively educated her because she was capable of self-education. Millicent and Gertie actually preferred the inferior displays of Oxford Street. She gazed in froward insolence at the workroom full of stitching girls on the opposite side of the street. They were toiling as though they had been toiling for hours. Customers had not yet

begun to be shown into the elegant apartment on the floor below the workrooms. Customers were probably still sipping tea in bed with a maid to help them, and some of them had certainly never been in a Tube in their lives. Yet the workgirls, seen broadly across the street, were on the average younger, prettier, daintier and more graceful than the customers. Why then...? Etc.

The upper floors of all the surrounding streets were studded with such nests of heads bent over needles. There were scores and scores of those crowded rooms, excruciatingly feminine. "Modes et Robes"--a charming vocation! You were always seeing and touching lovely stuff, laces, feathers and confections of stuffs. A far more attractive occupation than typewriting, Lilian thought. Sometimes she had dreamt of a change, but not seriously. To work on other women's attire, knowing that she could never rise to it herself, would have broken her heart.

Quickly she turned away from the window, still uplifted--passionately determined that one day she would enter the most renowned and exclusive arcana in Hanover Square, and not as an employee either! Then, on that day, would she please with the virtuosity of a great pianist playing the piano, then would she exert charm, then would she be angelic and divine; and when she departed there should be a murmur of conversation. She smiled her best in anticipation; her fingers ran smoothingly over her blouse.

Gertie Jackson came in and transformed the rehearsed smile into an expression of dissatisfaction and hostility far from divine; the fingers dropped as it were guiltily; and Lilian remembered all her grievances and her tragedy. Gertie Jackson's bright, pleasant, clear, drawn face showed some traces of fatigue, but no sign at all of being a martyr to the industrial system or to the despotism of individual employers. She was a tall, well-made girl of twenty-eight, and she held herself rather nicely. She was kindly, cheerful and of an agreeable temper--as placid as a bowl of milk. She loved her work, regarding it as of real importance, and she seemed to be entirely without ambition. Apparently she would be quite happy to go on altruistically typing for ever and ever, and to be cast into a typist's grave.

Lilian's attitude towards her senior colleague was in various respects critical. In the first place, the poor thing did not realize that she was growing old--already approaching the precipice of thirty! In the second place, though possessed of a good figure and face, she did nothing with these great gifts. She had no desire to be agreeable; she was agreeable unconsciously, as a bird sings; there was no merit in it. She had no coquetry, and not the slightest inclination for *chic*. Her clothes were "good," and bought in Upper Street, Islington; her excellent boots gave her away. She was not uninterested in men; but she did not talk about them, she twittered about them. To Lilian she had the soul of an infant. And she was too pure, too ingenuous, too kind, too conscientious; her nature lacked something fundamental, and Lilian felt but could not describe what it was--save by saying

that she had no kick in either her body or her soul. In the third place, there was that terrible absence of ambition. Lilian could not understand contentment, and Gertie's contentment exasperated her. She admitted that Gertie was faultless, and yet she tremendously despised the paragon, occasionally going so far as to think of her as a cat.

And now Gertie straightened herself, stuck her chest out bravely, according to habit, and smiled a most friendly greeting. Behind the smile lay concealed no resentment against Lilian for having failed to appear on the previous evening, and no moral superiority as a first-class devotee of duty. What lay behind it, and not wholly concealed, was a grave sense of responsibility for the welfare of the business in circumstances difficult and complex.

"Have you seen Miss Grig?" she asked solemnly.

"Yes," said Lilian, with a touch of careless defiance; she supposed Gertie to be delicately announcing that Miss G. had been lying in wait for her, Lilian.

"Doesn't she look simply frightfully ill?"

"She does," admitted Lilian, who in her egotism had quite forgotten her first impression that morning of Miss G.'s face. "What is it?"

Gertie mentioned the dreadful name of one of those hidden though not shameful maladies which afflict only women--but the majority of women. The crude words sounded oddly on Gertie's prim lips. Lilian was duly impressed; she was as if intimidated. At intervals the rumour of a victim of that class of diseases runs whisperingly through assemblages of women, who on the entrance of a male hastily change the subject of talk and become falsely bright. Yet every male in the circle of acquaintances will catch the rumour almost instantly, because some wife runs to inform her husband, and the husband informs all his friends.

"Who told you?" Lilian demanded.

"Oh! I've known about it for a long time," said Gertie without pride. "I told Milly just now, before I went out. Everybody will know soon." Lilian felt a pang of jealousy. "It means a terrible operation," Gertie added.

"But she oughtn't to be here!" Lilian exclaimed.

"No!" Gertie agreed with a surprising sternness that somewhat altered Lilian's estimate of her. "No! And she isn't *going* to be here, either! Not if I know it! I shall see that she gets back home at lunch-time. She's quarrelled already with Mr. Grig this morning about her coming up."

"Do you mean at home they quarrelled?"

"Yes. He got so angry that he said if she came he wouldn't. He was quite right to be angry, of course. But she came all the same."

"Miss G. must have told Gertie all that herself," Lilian reflected. "She'd never be as confidential with me. She'd never tell me anything!" And she had a queer feeling of inferiority.

"We must do all we can to help things," said Gertie.

"Of course!" agreed Lilian, suddenly softened, overcome by a rush of sympathy and a strong impulse to behave nobly, beautifully, forgivingly towards Miss G.

Nevertheless, though it was Gertie's attitude that had helped to inspire her, she still rather disdained the virtuous senior. Lilian appreciated profoundly--perhaps without being able to put her feeling into words--the heroic madness of Miss G. in defying common sense and her brother for the sake of the beloved business. But Gertie saw in Miss G.'s act nothing but a piece of naughty and sick foolishness. To Lilian Miss G. in her superficial yearning softness became almost a terrible figure, a figure to be regarded with awe, and to serve as an exemplar. But in contemplating Miss G. Lilian uneasily realized her own precariousness. Miss G. was old and plain (save that her eyes had beauty), and yet was fulfilling her great passion and was imposing herself on her environment. Miss G. was *doing*. Lilian could only *be*; she would always remain at the mercy of someone, and the success which she desired could last probably no longer than her youth and beauty. The transience of the gifts upon which she must depend frightened her--but at the same time intensified anew her resolves. She had not a moment to lose. And Gertie, standing there close to her, sweet and reliable and good, in the dull cage, amid the daily circumstances of their common slavery, would have understood nothing of Lilian's obscure emotion.

III
Shut

The two girls had not settled to work when the door of the small room was pushed cautiously open and Mr. Grig came in--as it were by stealth. Milly, prolonging her sweet hour of authority in the large room, had not yet returned to her mates. By a glance and a gesture Mr. Grig prevented the girls from any exclamation of surprise. Evidently he was secreting himself from his sister, and he must have entered the office without a sound. He looked older, worn, worried, captious--as though he needed balm and solace and treatment at once firm and infinitely soft. Lilian, who a few minutes earlier had been recalcitrant to Miss Grig's theory that women must protect men, now felt a desire to protect Mr. Grig, to save him

exquisitely from anxieties unsuited to his temperament.

He shut the door, and in the intimacy of the room faced the two girls, one so devoted, the other perhaps equally devoted but whose devotion was outshone by her brilliant beauty. For him both typists were very young, but they were both women, familiar beings whom the crisis had transformed from typists into angels of succour; and he had ceased to be an employer and become a man who demanded the aid of women and knew how to rend their hearts.

"Is she in there?" he snapped, with a movement of the head towards the principals' room.

"Yes," breathed Lilian.

"Yes," said Gertie. "Oh! Mr. Grig, she ought never to have come out in her state!"

"Well, God damn it, of course she oughtn't!" retorted Mr. Grig. His language, unprecedented in that room, ought to have shocked the respectable girls, but did not in the slightest degree. To judge from their demeanour they might have been living all their lives in an environment of blasphemous profanity. "Didn't I do everything I could to keep her at home?"

"Oh! I know you did!" Gertie agreed sympathetically. "She told me."

"I made a hades of a row with her about it in the hope of keeping her in the house. But it was no use. I swore I wouldn't move until she returned. But of course I've got to do something. Look here, one of you must go to her and tell her I'm waiting in a taxi downstairs to take her home, and that I shall stick in it till she gives way, even if I'm there all day. That ought to shift her. Tell her I've arranged for the doctor to be at the house at a quarter to eleven. You'd better go and do it, Miss Jackson. She's more likely to listen to you."

"Yes, do, Gertie! You go," Lilian seconded the instruction. Then: "What's the matter, Gertie? What on earth's the matter?"

The paragon had suddenly blanched and she seemed to shiver: first sign of acute emotion that Lilian had ever observed in the placid creature.

"It's nothing. I'm only---- It's really nothing."

And Gertie, who had not taken off her street-things, rose resolutely from her chair. She, who a little earlier had seemed quite energetic and fairly fresh after her night's work, now looked genuinely ill.

"You go along," Mr. Grig urged her, ruthlessly ignoring the symptoms which had startled Lilian. "And mind how you do it, there's a good creature. I'll get downstairs first." And he stepped out of the room.

The door opening showed tall, thin Millicent returning to her own work. Mr. Grig pushed past her on tiptoe. As soon as Gertie had disappeared on her mission into the principals' room, Lilian told Millicent, not without an air of superiority, as of an Under-secretary of State to a common member of Parliament, what was

occurring. Millicent, who loved "incidents," bit her lips in a kind of cruel pleasure. (She had a long, straight, absolutely regular nose, and was born to accomplish the domestic infelicity of some male clerk.) She made an excuse to revisit the large room in order to spread the thrilling news.

Lilian stood just behind the still open door of the small room. A long time elapsed. Then the door of the principals' room opened, and Lilian, discreetly peeping, saw the backs of Miss Grig and Gertie Jackson. They seemed to be supporting each other in their progress towards the outer door. She wondered what the expressions on their faces might be; she had no clue to the tenor of the scene which had ended in Gertie's success, for neither of the pair spoke a word. How had Gertie managed to beat the old fanatic?

After a little pause she went to the window and opened it and looked out at the pavement below. The taxi was there. Two foreshortened figures emerged from the building. Mr. Grig emerged from the taxi. Miss Grig was induced into the vehicle, and to Lilian's astonishment Gertie followed her. Mr. Grig entered last. As the taxi swerved away, a little outcry of voices drew Lilian's attention to the fact that both windows of the large room were open and full of clusters of heads. The entire office, thanks to that lath, Millicent, was disorganized. Lilian whipped in her own head like lightning.

At three o'clock she was summoned to the telephone. Mr. Grig was speaking from a call-office.

"Miss Jackson's got influenza, the doctor says," he announced grimly. "So she has to stay here. A nice handful for me. You'd better carry on. I'll try to come up later. Miss Grig said something about some accounts--I don't know."

Lilian, quite unable to check a feeling of intense, excited happiness, replied with soothing, eager sympathy and allegiance, and went with dignity into the principals' room, now for the moment lawfully at her mercy. The accounts of the establishment were always done by Miss Grig, and there was evidence on the desk that she had been obdurately at work on bills when Gertie Jackson enticed her away. In the evening Lilian, after a day's urgent toil at her machine, was sitting in Miss Grig's chair in the principals' room, at grips with the day-book, the night-book, the ledger and some bill-forms. Although experiencing some of the sensations of a traveller lost in a forest (of which the trees were numerals), she was saturated with bliss. She had dismissed the rest of the staff at the usual hour, firmly refusing to let anybody remain with her. Almost as a favour Millicent had been permitted to purchase a night's food for her.

Just as the clock of St. George's struck eight, it occurred to her that to allow herself to be found by Mr. Grig in the occupation of Miss Grig's place might amount to a grave failure in tact; and hastily--for he might arrive at any moment--she removed all the essential paraphernalia to the small room. She had heard

nothing further from Mr. Grig, who, moreover, had not definitely promised to come, but she was positive that he would come. However late the hour might be, he would come. She would hear the outer door open; she would hear his steps; she would see him; and he would see her, faithfully labouring all alone for him, and eager to take a whole night-watch for the second time in a week. For this hour she had made a special toilette, with much attention to her magnificent hair. She looked spick-and-span and enchanting.

Nor was she mistaken. Hardly had she arranged matters in her own room when the outer door did open, and she did hear his steps. The divine moment had arrived. He appeared in the doorway of the room. Rather to her regret he was not in evening dress. (But how could he be?) Still, he had a marvellous charm and his expression was less worried. He was almost too good to be true. She greeted him with a smile that combined sorrow and sympathy and welcome, fidelity and womanly comprehension, the expert assistant and the beautiful young Eve. She was so discomposed by the happiness of realization that at first she scarcely knew what either of them was saying, and then she seemed to come to herself and she caught Mr. Grig's voice clearly in the middle of a sentence:'

"... with a temperature of 104. The doctor said it would be madness to send her to Islington. This sort of influenza takes you like this, it appears. I shall have it myself next.... What are you supposed to be doing? Bills, eh?"

He looked hard at her, and her eyes dropped before his experienced masculine gaze. She liked him to be wrinkled and grey, to be thirty years older than herself, to be perhaps even depraved. She liked to contrast her innocent freshness with his worn maturity. She liked it that he had not shown the slightest appreciation of her loyalty. He spoke only vaguely of Miss Grig's condition; it was not a topic meet for discussion between them, and with a few murmured monosyllables she let it drop.

"I do hope you aren't thinking of staying, Mr. Grig," she said next. "I shall be perfectly all right by myself, and the bills will occupy me till something comes in."

"I'm not going to stay. Neither are you," replied Mr. Grig curtly. "We'll shut the place up."

Her face fell.

"But----"

"We'll shut up for to-night."

"But we're supposed to be always open! Supposing some work does come in! It always does----"

"No doubt. But we're going to shut up the place--at once." There was fatigue in his voice.

Tears came into Lilian's eyes. She had expected him, in answer to her appeal

to him to depart, to insist on staying with her. She had been waiting for heaven to unfold. And now he had decided to break the sacred tradition and close the office. She could not master her tears.

"Don't worry," he said in tones suddenly charged with tenderness and sympathetic understanding. "It can't be helped. I know just how you feel, and don't you imagine I don't. You've been splendid. But I had to promise Isabel I'd shut the office to-night. She's in a very bad state, and I did it to soothe her. You know she hates me to be here at nights--thinks I'm not strong enough for it."

"That's not her reason to-night," said Lilian to herself. "I know her reason to-night well enough!"

But she gave Mr. Grig a look grateful for his exquisite compassion, which had raised him in her sight to primacy among men.

Obediently she let herself be dismissed first, leaving him behind, but in the street she looked up at her window. The words "Open day and night" on the blind were no longer silhouetted against a light within. The tradition was broken. On the way to the Dover Street Tube she did not once glance behind her to see if he was following.

IV
The Vizier

Late in the afternoon of the following day Mr. Grig put his head inside the small room.

"Just come here, Miss Share," he began, and then, seeing that Millicent was not at her desk, he appeared to decide that he might as well speak with Lilian where she was.

He had been away from the office most of the day, and even during his presences had seemingly taken no part in its conduct. Much work had been received, some of it urgent, and Lilian, typing at her best speed, had the air of stopping with reluctance to listen to whatever the useless and wandering man might have to say. He merely said:

"We shall close to-night, like last night."

"Oh, but, Mr. Grig," Lilian protested--and there was no sign of a tear this time--"we can't possibly keep on closing. We had one complaint this morning

about being closed last night. I didn't tell you because I didn't want to worry you."

"Now listen to me," Mr. Grig protested in his turn, petulantly. "Nothing worries me more than the idea that people are keeping things from me in order that I shan't be worried. My sister was always doing that; she was incurable, but I'm not going to have it from anyone else. If you hide things, why are you silly enough to let out afterwards that you were hiding them and why you were hiding them? That's what I can't understand."

"Sorry, Mr. Grig," Lilian apologized briefly and with sham humility, humouring the male in such a manner that he must know he was being humoured.

His petulancy charmed her. It gave him youth, and gave her age and wisdom. He had good excuse for it--Miss Grig had been moved into a nursing home preparatory to an operation, and Gertie was stated to be very ill in his house--and she enjoyed excusing him. It was implicit in every tone of his voice that they were now definitely not on terms of employer and employee.

"That's all right! That's all right!" he said, mollified by her discreet smile. "But close at six. I'm off."

"I really don't think we ought to close," she insisted, with firmness in her voice followed by persuasion in her features, and she brushed back her hair with a gesture of girlishness that could not be ineffective. He hesitated, frowning. She went on: "If it gets about that we're closing night after night, we're bound to lose a lot of customers. I can perfectly well stay here."

"Yes! And be no use at all to-morrow!"

"I should be here to-morrow just the same. If other girls can do it, why can't I?" (A touch of harshness in the question.) "Oh, Milly!" she exclaimed, neglecting to call Milly Miss Merrislate, according to the custom by which in talking to the principals everybody referred to everybody else as "Miss." "Oh, Milly!"--Millicent appeared behind Mr. Grig at the door and he nervously made way for her--"here's Mr. Grig wants to close again to-night! I'm sure we really oughtn't to. I've told Mr. Grig I'll stay--and be here to-morrow too. Don't you agree we mustn't close?"

Millicent was flattered by the frank appeal as an equal from one whom she was already with annoyance beginning to regard as a superior. From timidity in Mr. Grig's presence she looked down her too straight nose, but she nodded affirmatively her narrow head, and as soon as she had recovered from the disturbing novelty of deliberately opposing the policy of an employer she said to Lilian:

"I'll stay with you if you like. There's plenty to do, goodness knows!"

"You are a dear!" Lilian exclaimed, just as if they had been alone together in the room.

"Oh, well, have it as you like!" Mr. Grig rasped, and left, defeated.

"Is he vexed?" Milly demanded after he had gone.

"Of course not! He's very pleased, really. But he has to save his face."

Milly gave Lilian a scarcely conscious glance of admiration, as a woman better versed than herself in the mysteries of men, and also as a woman of unsuspected courage. And she behaved like an angel through the whole industrious night--so much so that Lilian was nearly ready to admit to an uncharitable premature misjudgment of the girl.

"And now what are you going to do about keeping open?" inquired Mr. Grig, with bland, grim triumph the next afternoon to the exhausted Lilian and the exhausted Millicent. "I thought I'd let you have your own way last night. But you can't see any further than your noses, either of you. You're both dead."

"I can easily stay up another night," said Lilian desperately, but Millicent said nothing.

"No doubt!" Mr. Grig sneered. "You look as if you could! And supposing you do, what about to-morrow night? The whole office is upset, and, of course, people must go and choose just this time to choke us with work!"

"Well, anyhow, we can't close," Lilian stoutly insisted.

"No!" Mr. Grig unexpectedly agreed. "Miss Merrislate, you know most about the large room. You'd better pick two of 'em out of there, and tell 'em they must stay and do the best they can by themselves. But that won't carry us through. *I* certainly shan't sit up, and I won't have you two sitting up every second night in turn. There's only one thing to do. I must engage two new typists at once--that's clear. We may as well face the situation. Where do we get 'em from?"

But neither Lilian nor Milly knew just how Miss Grig was in the habit of finding recruits to the staff. Each of them had been taken on through private connexions. Gertie Jackson would probably have known how to proceed, but Gertie was down with influenza.

"I'll tell you what I shall do," said Mr. Grig at last. "I'll get an advertisement into to-morrow's *Daily Chronicle*. That ought to do the trick. This affair's got to be handled quickly. When the applicants come you'd better deal with 'em, Miss Share--in my room. I shan't be here to-morrow."

He spoke scornfully, and would not listen to offers of help in the matter of the advertisement. He would see to it himself, and wanted no assistance, indeed objected to assistance as being merely troublesome. The next day was the day of Miss Grig's operation, and the apprehension of it maddened this affectionate and cantankerous brother. Millicent left the small room to bestow upon two chosen members of the rabble in the large room the inexpressible glory of missing a night's sleep.

On the following morning, when Lilian, refreshed, arrived zealously at the office half an hour earlier than usual, she found three aspirants waiting to apply for the vacant posts. The advertisement had been drawn up and printed; the newspaper had been distributed and read, and the applicants, pitifully eager, had

already begun to arrive from the ends of London. Sitting in Miss Grig's chair, Lilian nervously interviewed and examined them. One of the three gave her age as thirty-nine, and produced yellowed testimonials. By ten o'clock twenty-three suitors had come, and Lilian, frightened by her responsibilities, had impulsively engaged a couple, who took off hats and jackets and began to work at once. She had asked Millicent to approve of the final choice, but Millicent, intensely jealous and no longer comparable to even the lowest rank of angel, curtly declined.

"You're in charge," Millicent said acidly. "Don't you try to push it on to me, Miss Lilian Share."

Aspirants continued to arrive. Lilian had the clever idea of sticking a notice on the outer door: "All situations filled. No typists required." But aspirants continued to enter, and all of them averred positively that they had not seen the notice on the door. Lilian told a junior to paste four sheets of typing paper together, and she inscribed the notice on the big sheet in enormous characters. But aspirants continued to enter, and all of them averred positively that they had not seen the notice on the door. It was dreadful, it was appalling, because Lilian was saying to herself: "I may be like them one day." Millicent, on the other hand, disdained the entire procession, and seized the agreeable rôle of dismissing applicants as fast as they came.

In the evening Mr. Grig appeared. The operation had been a success. Gertie Jackson was, if anything, a little worse; but the doctor anticipated an improvement. Mr. Grig showed not the least interest in his business. Lilian took the night duty alone.

Thenceforward the office settled gradually into its new grooves, and, though there was much less efficiency than under Miss Grig, there was little friction. Everybody except Millicent regarded Lilian as the grand vizier, and Millicent's demeanour towards Lilian was by turns fantastically polite and fantastically indifferent.

A fortnight passed. The two patients were going on well, and it was stated that there was a possibility of them being sent together to Felixstowe for convalescence. Mr. Grig's attendance grew more regular, but he did little except keep the books and make out the bills; in which matter he displayed a facility that amazed Lilian, who really was not a bit arithmetical.

One day, entering the large room after hours, Lilian saw Millicent typing on a machine not her own. As she passed she read the words: "My darling Gertie. I simply can't tell you how glad I was to get your lovely letter." And it flashed across her that Millicent would relate all the office doings to Gertie, who would relate them to Miss Grig. She had a spasm of fear, divining that Millicent would misrepresent her. In what phrases had Millicent told that Lilian had sat in Miss Grig's chair and interviewed applicants for situations! Was it not strange that

Gertie had not written to her, Lilian, nor she even thought of writing to Gertie? Too late now for her to write to Gertie! A few days later Mr. Grig said to Lilian in the small room:'

"You're very crowded here, aren't you?"

The two new-comers had been put into the small room, being of a superior sort and not fitted to join the rabble.

"Oh, no!" said Lilian. "We're quite comfortable, thank you."

"You don't seem to be very comfortable. It occurs to me it would be better in every way if you brought your machine into my room."

An impulse, and an error of judgment, on Felix's part! But he was always capricious.

"I should prefer to stay where I am," Lilian answered, not smiling. What a letter Millicent would have written in order to describe Lilian's promotion to the principals' room!

Often, having made a mistake, Felix would persist in it from obstinacy.

"Oh! As you like!" he muttered huffily, instead of recognizing by his tone that Lilian was right. But the next moment he repeated, very softly and kindly: "As you like! It's for you to decide." He had not once shown the least appreciation of, or gratitude for, Lilian's zeal. On the contrary, he had been in the main querulous and censorious. But she did not mind. She was richly rewarded by a single benevolent inflection of that stirring voice. She seemed to have forgotten that she was born for pleasure, luxury, empire. Work fully satisfied her, but it was work for him. The mere suggestion that she should sit in his room filled her with deep joy.

V
The Martyr

Miss Grig came back to the office on a Thursday, and somewhat mysteriously. Millicent, no doubt from information received through Gertie Jackson, had been hinting for several days that the return would not be long delayed; but Mr. Grig had said not one word about the matter until the Wednesday evening, when he told Lilian, with apparent casualness, as she was leaving for the night, that his sister might be expected the next morning. As for Miss Jackson, she would resume her duties only on the Monday, having family affairs to transact at Islington.

Miss Jackson, it seemed, had developed into the trusted companion and intimate--almost ally, if the term were not presumptuous--of the soul and dynamo of the business. Miss Grig and she had suffered together, they had solaced and strengthened each other; and Gertie, for all her natural humility, was henceforth to play in the office a rôle superior to that of a senior employee. She had already been endowed with special privileges, and among these was the privilege of putting the interests of Islington before the interests of Clifford Street.

The advent of Miss Grig, of course, considerably agitated the office and in particular the small room, two of whose occupants had never seen the principal of whose capacity for sustained effort they had heard such wonderful and frightening tales.

At nine-thirty that Thursday morning it was reported in both rooms that Miss Grig had re-entered her fortress. Nobody had seen her, but ears had heard her, and, moreover, it was mystically known by certain signs, as, for example, the reversal of a doormat which had been out of position for a week, that a higher presence was immanent in the place and that the presence could be none other than Miss Grig. Everybody became an exemplar of assiduity, amiability, and entire conscientiousness. Everybody prepared a smile; and there was a universal wish for the day to be over.

Shortly after ten o'clock Miss Grig visited the small room, shook hands with Lilian and Millicent, and permitted the two new typists to be presented to her. Millicent spoke first and was so effusive in the expression of the delight induced in her by the spectacle of Miss Grig and of her sympathy for the past and hope for the future of Miss Grig's health, that Lilian, who nevertheless did her best to be winning, could not possibly compete with her. Miss Grig had a purified and chastened air, as of one detached by suffering from the grossness and folly of the world, and existing henceforth in the world solely from a cold, passionate sense of duty. Her hair was greyer, her mild equable voice more soft, and her burning eyes had a brighter and more unearthly lustre. She said that she was perfectly restored, let fall that Mr. Grig had gone away at her request for a short, much-needed holiday, and then passed smoothly on to the large room.

After a while a little flapper of a beginner came to tell Millicent that Miss Grig wanted her. Millicent, who had had charge of the petty cash during the interregnum, was absent for forty minutes. When she returned, flushed but smiling, to her expectant colleagues, she informed Lilian that Miss Grig desired to see her at twelve o'clock.

"I notice there's an account here under the name of Lord Mackworth," Miss Grig began, having allowed Lilian to stand for a few seconds before looking up from the ledger and other books in which she was apparently absorbed. She spoke with the utmost gentleness, and fixed her oppressive deep eyes on Lilian's.

"Yes, Miss Grig?"

"It hasn't been paid."

"Oh!" Lilian against an intense volition began to blush.

"Didn't you know?"

"I didn't," said Lilian.

"But you've been having something to do with the books during my absence."

"I did a little at first," Lilian admitted. "Then Mr. Grig saw to them."

"Miss Merrislate tells me that you had quite a lot to do with them, and I see your handwriting in a number of places here."

"I've had nothing to do with them for about three weeks--I should think at least three weeks, and--and of course I expected the bill would be paid by this time."

"But you never asked?"

"No. It never occurred to me."

This statement was inaccurate. Lilian had often wondered whether Lord Mackworth had paid his bill, but, from some obscurely caused self-consciousness, she had not dared to make any inquiry. She felt herself to be somehow "mixed up" with Lord Mackworth, and had absurdly feared that if she mentioned the name there might appear on the face or in the voice of the detestable Milly some sinister innuendo.

"Miss Merrislate tells me that she didn't trouble about the account as she supposed it was your affair."

"My affair!" exclaimed Lilian impulsively. "It's no more my affair than anybody else's." She surmised in the situation some ingenious malevolence of the flat-breasted mischief-maker.

"But you did the work?"

"Yes. It came in while I was on duty that night, and I did it at once. There was no one else to do it."

"Who brought it in?"

"Lord Mackworth."

"Did you know him?"

"Certainly not. I didn't know him from Adam."

"Never mind Adam, Miss Share," observed Miss Grig genially. "Has Lord Mackworth been in since?"

"If he has I've not seen him," Lilian answered defiantly.

Miss Grig's geniality exasperated her because it did not deceive her.

"I'm only asking for information," Miss Grig said with a placatory smile. "I see the copies were delivered at six-thirty in the morning. Who delivered the job?"

"I did."

"Where?"

"At his address. I dropped it into the letter-box on my way home after my night's work. I stayed here because somebody had to stay, and I did the best I could."

"I'm quite sure of that," Miss Grig agreed. "And, of course, you've been paid for all overtime--and there's been quite a good deal. We all do the best we can. At least, I hope so.... And you've never seen Lord Mackworth since?"

"No."

"And you simply dropped the envelope into the letter-box?"

"Yes."

"Didn't see Lord Mackworth that morning?"

"Certainly not."

By this time Lilian was convinced that Miss Grig's intention was to provoke her to open resentment. She guessed also that Milly must have deliberately kept silence to her, Lilian, about the Mackworth account in the hope of trouble on Miss Grig's return, and that Milly had done everything she could that morning to ensure trouble. The pot had been simmering in secret for weeks; now it was boiling over. She felt helpless and furious.

"You know," Miss Grig proceeded, "there's a rule in this office that night-work must only be delivered by hand by the day-staff the next day. If it's wanted urgently before the day-staff arrives the customer must fetch it."

"Excuse me, Miss Grig, I never heard of that rule."

Miss Grig smiled again: "Well, at any rate, it was your business to have heard of it, my dear. Everybody else knows about it."

"I told Mr. Grig I was going to deliver it myself, and he didn't say anything."

"Please don't attempt to lay the blame on my brother. He is far too good-natured." Miss Grig's gaze burned into Lilian's face as, with an enigmatic intonation, she uttered these words. "You did wrong. And I suppose you've never heard either of the rule that new customers must always pay on or before delivery?"

"Yes, I have. But I couldn't ask for the money at half-past six in the morning, could I? And I couldn't tell him how much it would be before I'd typed it."

"Yes, you could, my dear, and you ought to have done. You could have estimated it and left a margin for errors. That was the proper course. And if you know anything about Lord Mackworth you must know that his debts are notorious. I believe he's one of the fastest young men about town, and it's more than possible that that account's a bad debt."

"But can't we send in the account again?" Lilian weakly suggested; she was overthrown by the charge of fast-living against Lord Mackworth, yet she had always in her heart assumed that he was a fast liver.

"I've just telephoned to 6a St. James's Street, and I needn't say that Lord Mackworth is no longer there, and they don't know where he is. You see what comes of disobeying rules."

Lilian lifted her head: "Well, Miss Grig, the bill isn't so very big, and if you'll please deduct it from my wages on Saturday I hope that will be the end of that."

It was plain that the bewildered creature had but an excessively imperfect notion of how to be an employee. She had taken to the vocation too late in life.

Miss Grig put her hand to the support of her forehead, and paused.

"I can tolerate many things," said she, with great benignity, "but not insolence."

"I didn't mean to be insolent."

"You did. And I think you had better accept a week's notice from Saturday. No. On second thoughts, I'll pay your wages up to Saturday week now and you can go at once." She smiled kindly. "That will give you time to turn round."

"Oh! Very well, if it's like that!"

Miss Grig unlocked a drawer; and while she was counting the money Lilian thought despairingly that if Mr. Grig, or even if the nice Gertie, had been in the office, the disaster could not have occurred.

Miss Grig shook hands with her and wished her well.

"Where are you going to? It's not one o'clock yet," asked Millicent in the small room as Lilian silently unhooked her hat and jacket from the clothes-cupboard.

"Out."

"What for?"

"For Miss G., if you want to know."

And she left. Except her clothes, not a thing in the office belonged to her. She had no lien, no attachment. The departure was as simple and complete as leaving a Tube train. No word! No good-bye! Merely a disappearance.

VI
The Invitation

She walked a mile eastwards along Oxford Street before entering a teashop, in order to avoid meeting any of the girls, all of whom, except the very youngest

and the very stingiest, distributed themselves among the neighbouring establishments for the absurdly insufficient snack called lunch. Every place was full just after one o'clock, and crammed at one-fifteen. She asked for a whole meat pie instead of a half, for she felt quite unusually hungry. A plot! That was what it was! A plot against her, matured by Miss G. in a few minutes out of Milly's innuendoes written to Gertie and spoken to Miss G. herself. And the reason of the plot was Miss G.'s spinsterish, passionate fear of a friendship between Felix Grig and Lilian! Lilian was ready to believe that Miss G. had engineered the absence of both her brother and Gertie so as to be free to work her will without the possibility of complications. If Miss G. hated her, she hated Miss G. with at least an equal fierceness--the fierceness of an unarmed victim. The injustice of the world staggered her. She thought that something ought to be done about it. Even Lord Mackworth was gravely to blame, for not having paid his bill. Still, that detail had not much importance, because Miss G., deprived of one pretext, would soon have found another. After all that she, Lilian, had done for the office, to be turned off at a moment's notice, and without a character--for Miss G. would never give a reference, and Lilian would never ask for a reference! Never! Nor would she nor could she approach Felix Grig; nor Gertie either. Perhaps Felix Grig might communicate with her. He certainly ought to do so. But then, he was very casual, forgetful and unconsciously cruel.

All the men and girls in the packed tea-shop had work behind them and work in front of them. They knew where they were; they had a function on the earth. She, Lilian, had nothing, save a couple of weeks' wages and perhaps a hundred pounds in the Post Office Savings Bank. Resentment against her father flickered up anew from its ashes in her heart.

How could she occupy herself after lunch? Unthinkable for her to go to her lodging until the customary hour, unless she could pretend to be ill; and if she feigned illness the well-disposed slavey would be after her and would see through the trick at once, and it would be all over the house that something had happened to Miss Share. The afternoon was an enormous trackless expanse which had to be somehow traversed by a weary and terribly discouraged wayfarer. Her father had been in the habit of conducting his family on ceremonial visits to the public art galleries. She went to the Wallace Collection, and saw how millionaires lived in the 'seventies, and how the unchaste and lovely ladies were dressed for whom entire populations were sacrificed in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Thence to a cinema near the Marble Arch, and saw how virtue infallibly wins after all.

When, after travelling countless leagues of time and ennui, she reached home she received a note from Mr. Pladda inviting her to the Hammersmith Palais de Danse for the following night. Mr. Pladda was the star lodger in the house--a

man of forty-five, legally separated from his wife but of impeccable respectability and decorum. His illusion was that he could dance rather well. Mr. Pladda was evidently coming on.

The next morning, which was very fine, Lilian spent in Hyde Park, marshalling her resources. Beyond her trifling capital she had none. Especially she had no real friends. She had unwisely cut loose from her parents' acquaintances, and she could not run after them now that she was in misfortune. Her former colleagues? Out of the question! Gertie might prove a friend, but Gertie must begin; Lilian could not begin. Lord Mackworth? Silly idea! She still thought of Lord Mackworth romantically. He was an unattainable hero at about the same level as before in her mind, for while his debts had lowered him his advertised dissoluteness had mysteriously raised him. (Yet in these hours and days Mr. Pladda himself was not more absolutely respectable and decorous, in mind and demeanour, than Lilian.) She went to two cinemas in the afternoon, and, safe in the darkness of the second one, cried silently.

But with Mr. Pladda at the Palais de Danse she was admirably cheerful, and Mr. Pladda was exceedingly proud of his companion, who added refined manners to startling beauty. She delicately praised his dancing, whereupon he ordered lemon squashes and tomato sandwiches. At the little table she told him calmly that she was leaving her present situation and taking another.

Back in her room she laughed with horrid derision. And as soon as she was in bed the clockwork mice started to run round and round in her head. A plot! A plot! What a burning shame! What a burning shame! ... A few weeks earlier she had actually been bestowing situations on pitiful applicants. Now she herself had no situation and no prospect of any. She had never had to apply for a situation. She had not been educated to applying for situations. She could not imagine herself ever applying for a situation. She had not the least idea how to begin to try to get a situation. She passed the greater part of Sunday in bed, and in the evening went to church and felt serious and good.

On Monday morning she visited the Post Office and filled up a withdrawal form for forty pounds. She had had a notion of becoming a companion to a rich lady, or private secretary to a member of Parliament. She would advertise. Good clothes, worn as she could wear them, would help her. (She could not face another situation in an office. No, she couldn't.) The notion of a simpleton, of course! But she was still a simpleton. The notion, however, was in reality only a pretext for obtaining some good clothes. All her life she had desired more than anything a smart dress. There was never a moment in her life when she was less entitled to indulge herself; but she felt desperate. She was taking to clothes as some take to brandy. On the Wednesday she received the money: a colossal, a marvellous sum. She ran off with it and nervously entered a big shop in Wigmore Street; the

shop was a wise choice on her part, for it combined smartness with a discreet and characteristic Englishness. Impossible to have the dangerous air of an adventuress in a frock bought at that shop!

The next few days were spent in exactly fitting and adapting the purchases to her body. She had expended the forty pounds and drawn out eight more. Through the medium of the slavey she borrowed a mirror, and fixed it at an angle with her own so that she could see her back. She was so interested and absorbed that she now and then neglected to feel unhappy and persecuted. She neglected also to draw up an advertisement, postponing that difficult matter until the clothes should be finished. But the house gathered that Miss Share had got her new situation. One afternoon, early, returning home after a search for white elastic in Hammersmith, she saw Mr. Grig coming away from the house. She stood still, transfixed; she flushed hotly, and descried a beneficent and just God reigning in heaven. She knew she was saved; and the revulsion in her was nearly overwhelming. A miracle! And yet--not a miracle at all; for Mr. Grig was bound by every consideration of honour and decency to get into communication with her sooner or later. Her doubts of his integrity had been inexcusable.

"I've just left a note for you," he said, affecting carelessness. "I brought it down myself because I couldn't remember whether your number was 56 or 65, and I had to inquire. Moreover, it's urgent. I want to talk to you. Will you dine with me to-night at the Devonshire Restaurant, Jermyn Street? Eight o'clock. I shan't be able to dress, so you could wear a hat. Yes or no?..." He was gone again in a moment.

Lilian literally ran upstairs to her room in order to be alone with her ecstatic happiness. She hugged it, kissed it, smothered it; then read the wonderful note three times, and reviewed all her new clothes.

VII
The Avowal

As Lilian armed herself for the field she discovered that, after all her care, she had omitted to provide several small details, the absence of each of which seemed for a few moments in turn to be a disaster. But on the whole she was well satisfied with the total effectiveness. The slattern, who had been furtively summoned, and who was made to wash her hands before touching a hook-and-eye, expressed, in

whispers, an admiring amazement which enheartened Lilian in spite of its uninformed quality. The girl, as if bewitched, followed the vision down to the front door.

"If it rains you're ruined, miss," said the girl anxiously, glancing up into the heavy darkness where not a star was to be seen. "You ought for to have an umbrella."

Lilian shook her head.

"It won't rain," she answered cheerfully.

But as soon as she was fairly away from the house she felt, or thought she felt, a drop of rain, and, seeing a taxi, she impulsively hailed it, wishing to heaven the next instant that she had not been so audacious. For although twice with her father and mother she had ridden in taxis on very great occasions, she had never in her life actually taken one by herself. Her voice failed and broke as she said to the driver: "Devonshire Restaurant, Jermyn Street"; but the driver was proficient in comprehension, and the Devonshire Restaurant in Jermyn Street seemed to be as familiar to him as Charing Cross Station.

In the taxi she collected herself. She thought she was all right except for her lips. She knew that her lips ought to have been slightly coloured, but she thought she also knew what was the best lip-stick and she had not been able to get it in Hammersmith. As for her nails, she was glad that it had been impossible for her to tint them. She must remember that she was a typist, and though typists, and even discharged typists, generally help their lips to be crimson on state-nights, they do not usually tint their nails--unless they have abandoned discretion.

Lilian was glad when justifying rain began to fall. While she paid the driver at her destination, a commissionaire held a vast umbrella over her fragile splendour.

Her legs literally shook as she entered the restaurant, exactly as once they had shaken in an air-raid. Within was a rich, tiny little waiting-room with a view of the dining-room beyond. She hesitated awkwardly, for owing to the taxi she was nearly a quarter of an hour too early. A respectful attendant said:

"Are you expecting anyone, madam?"

"Yes."

"What name, madam?"

"Mr. Grig."

"Oh yes, madam. His table is booked."

She had sat down. She could now inspect herself in half a dozen large mirrors, and she almost ceased to fear for her appearance. It was her deportment and demeanour that now troubled her. In this matter she was disturbingly aware that she had both to unlearn and to learn. She looked through the glass partition into the restaurant. It was small but sumptuous; and empty of diners save for a

couple of women who were smoking and eating simultaneously. People, chiefly in couples, kept arriving and passing through the antechamber. She picked up a copy of *What's On*, pretending to study it but studying the arrivals. Then she felt a man come in and glimpsed the attendant pointing to herself. Mr. Grig could not entirely conceal his astonishment at the smartness of her appearance. He had in fact not immediately recognized her. His surprised pleasure and appreciation gave her both pleasure and confidence.

"I'm not late," he said, resuming rapidly his rather quizzical matter-of-factness.

"No. I was too early."

The attendant took Mr. Grig's overcoat like a sacred treasure; he was shown to be in a dark blue suit; and they passed to the restaurant.

Lilian thought:

"Anyway, he can't think I've bought these clothes specially for this affair, because he only asked me this afternoon."

The table reserved was in a corner. Lilian had a full view of the whole restaurant, while Mr. Grig had a full view of nothing but Lilian. For a girl in Lilian's situation he was an ideal host, for the reason that he talked just as naturally--and in particular curtly--as if they had been at the office together. When a waiter shackled in silver approached with the wine list, he asked:

"What wine do you prefer?"

"Whatever you prefer," she replied, with a prompt and delicious smile.

"Oh, no!" he protested. "That won't do at all. If a woman's given the choice she ought to choose. She must submit ideas, at any rate. Otherwise we shall go wandering all through the wine list and finally settle on something neither of us wants."

Lilian had learnt a little about wines (she had sipped often from the paternal glass), and also about good plain cooking.

"Burgundy," she said.

Without another word Mr. Grig turned to the Burgundy page, and while he was selecting Lilian took off her gloves and gazed timidly around. It was the silver table-lamps, each glowing under a canopy of orange, that impressed her more than anything else. She saw shoulders, bosoms, pearls, white shirt-fronts, black backs--the room was still filling--all repeated in gilt mirrors. The manner of the numerous waiters corresponded to her notion of court chamberlains. This was the first high-class restaurant she had ever seen, and despite her nervousness she felt more at home in it, more exultingly happy in it, than anywhere before in all her existence. She passionately loved it, and her beauty seemed to increase in radiance. She liked to think that it was extremely costly. Compare it to the Palais de Danse, Mr. Pladda, and the tomato sandwiches! Ah! It was the genuine article

at last! She took surreptitious glances also at Mr. Grig's bent face; and the face was so strange to her, though just the same as of old, that she might have been seeing it for the first time. The greatness, the enormity of the occasion, frightened her. What were they doing there together? And what in the future would they do together? Was he really and seriously attracted by her? Was she in love with him? Or was it all a curious and dangerous deception? She had always understood that when one was in love one knew definitely that one was in love. Whereas she was sure of nothing whatever. Nevertheless she was uplifted into a beatific, irrational and reckless joy. Never had she felt as she felt while Mr. Grig was selecting the Burgundy.

"Now we'd better be getting to business," said he, when the hors *d'oeuvre* had been removed and the soup served. "I had a letter from my sister this morning. She wrote--wait a minute!" He pulled a letter from his pocket and read out: "'I'm sorry to say I've been compelled to get rid of poor Lilian Share. She's a nice enough girl in her way, but when you're not here I'm in charge of this office, and as she couldn't treat me with the respect due to me, I had to decide at once what to do, and I did decide. I treated her generously, and I hope she'll soon get another place. She will, of course, because she can be so very attractive *when she likes*'--underlined--'but I fear she isn't likely to keep it unless she changes her style of behaviour.'" He smacked the letter together and returned it to his pocket. "There, you see! I'm being remarkably frank with you. I came up from Brighton on purpose to tell you, and I'm going, back by the last train to-night. My sister is quite unaware of this escapade. In fact, at the moment I'm leading a double life. Now! I've given you one version of this mighty incident. Give me your version."

Lilian, troubled, looked at her mother's engagement ring on her finger--the sole jewel she carried--and smiled with acute restraint at her plate.

"*Have* you got another situation? I suppose not," Mr. Grig went on.

"No--not yet."

"Have you tried for one?"

"No."

"Then what are you about?"

"Oh! My father left me a little money--very little, but I'm not starving."

"So I should judge.... Well, tell me all about it."

"I didn't mean to be rude to her--really I didn't. It was about a small bill of Lord Mackworth's."

She related the episode in detail, repeating the conversation with marvellous exactitude, but with too many "she saids, she saids" and "I saids, I saids." Mr. Grig laughed when she came to the offer to pay the bill herself, and after a moment she gave a slight responsive smile. She was very careful not to make or even to imply the least charge against Miss Grig, and she accomplished the duplicity

with much skill.

"I can promise you one thing," said Mr. Grig. "The moment I get back I'll see that Milly is sacked. I cannot stick that bag of bones."

"*Please* don't!"

"You don't want me to?"

Lilian shook her head slowly.

"All right, then. I won't. Now I'll tell you the whole business in a nutshell. My sister's a great woman. She's perfectly mad, but she's a great woman. Only where I'm concerned she's always most monstrously unscrupulous. I'm her religion--always was, but more than ever since I bought that amusing business. She was dying of boredom. It saved her. When I got myself divorced she was absolutely delighted. She had me to herself again. Her jealousy where I'm concerned is ferocious. She can't help it, but it's ferocious. Tigresses aren't in it with her. She was jealous of you, and she'd determined to clear you out. I've perceived that for a long time."

"But why should she be jealous of me? I'm sure I've never----"

"Well, she's damned clever, Isabel is, and she's seen that I'm in love with you. Gone--far gone!"

He spoke with strange detachment, as of another person.

The thud-thud of Lilian's heart appalled her. She blushed down to her neck. Her hand shook. The restaurant and all its inhabitants vanished in a cloud and then slowly reappeared. Her confusion of mind was terrible. She was shocked, outraged, by the negligently brutal candour of the avowal; and at the same time she was thinking: "I'd no idea that any man was as marvellous as this man is, and I don't think there can possibly be another man quite as marvellous anywhere. And his being in love with me is the most ravishing, lovely, tender--tender--tender thing that ever happened to any girl. And, of course, he is in love with me. He's not pretending. *He* would never pretend...."

She wanted to be unconscious for a little while. She did not know it, but her beautiful face was transfigured by the interplay of shyness, modesty, soft resentment, gratitude, ecstasy and determination. Her head was bowed and she could not raise it. Neither could she utter a single word. She looked divine, and thought she looked either silly or sulky. Mr. Grig glanced aside. A glimpse of paradise had dazzled the eternal youth in him. The waiter bore away the soup-plates.

"Perhaps that's enough about business for the present," said Mr. Grig at length. "Let's talk about something else. But before we start I must just tell you you're the most stylish creature in this restaurant. I was staggered when I came in and saw you. Staggered!"

She did raise her head.

"Why?" she asked with exquisite gentleness.

Mr. Grig, overwhelmed, offered no response.

As for her determination, it amounted to this: "I will be as marvellous as he is. I will be more marvellous. I will be queen, slave, everything. He doesn't guess what is in store for him." She did not think about the difference in their ages, nor about marriage; nor did she even consider whether or not she was in love with him. Chiefly, she was grateful. And what she saw in front of her was a sublime vocation. Her mood was ever so faintly tinged with regret because they were not both in evening dress.

VIII
Philosophy of the Grey-haired

The evening and all Lilian's emotions seemed to start afresh. The look of the restaurant was changed. The tables had been cleared of the grosser apparatus of eating, and showed white cloths with only white plates, fruit, small glasses, small cups, ash-trays. Most of the waiters had vanished; the remainder stood aside, moveless, inobtrusive, watchful. The diners had abandoned themselves to intimacy or the sweet coma of digestion. Some talked rather loudly, others in a murmur. Women leaned back, or put their elbows on the table, letting cigarette smoke float upwards across their eyes. A few tables were already deserted, and the purity of their emptiness seemed bafflingly to demonstrate that events may happen and leave behind absolutely no trace. Without consulting Lilian Mr. Grig gave an order and two small glasses were slowly filled to the brim with a green liquid. Lilian recognized it for the very symbol of delicate licence. She was afraid to sip, lest she might be disillusioned concerning it, and also lest the drinking of it might malignly hasten the moment of departure of the last train for Brighton.

Mr. Grig was of those who murmured. His wrists lay one over the other on the table and his face was over the table; and it seemed strange, so low and even was his speech, that Lilian could catch every word, as she did. The people at the next table could have heard nothing. All the animation and variety were in his features, none in his tone. He had been telling her about Brighton. He saw the town of Brighton as a living, developing whole, discussing it as a single organism, showing how its evolution was still in active process, and making the small group of men who were exploiting it and directing it appear like creative giants

and the mass of inhabitants like midgets utterly unconscious of their own manipulation. And in his account of the vast affair there was no right and no wrong; there were merely the dark aims and the resolution of the giants determined to wax in power and to imprint themselves on the municipality. Lilian had never heard such revealing talk; she could not follow all of it, but she was fascinated, wonderstruck; profoundly impressed by the quality of the brain opposite to her and the contemptibleness of her own ignorance of life; amazed and enraptured that this brain could be interested in herself. Mr. Grig related the story of the middle-aged proprietor of one of the chief hotels who had married a young wife.

"He had broken up his family, and the family is the real unit of society--and there was no need for it! No need at all! But then, you see, he'd never had time in his existence to understand that a middle-aged man who has already had experience of marriage and marries a girl young enough to be his daughter is either a coward or a fool or without taste. He would only do it because he's mad for her, and that's the very reason for not doing it. When romance comes in that way it wants the sauce of secrecy and plotting--the double life, and so on. The feeling of naughtiness--naughtiness is simply a marvellous feeling; you must sometimes have guessed that, haven't you?--perversity, doing society in the eye. It's a continual excitement. Of course, it needs cleverness on both sides. You haven't got to be clumsy over it. The woman runs risks, but nothing to the risks she'd run in marriage. And if the thing dies out in her, and they haven't been clumsy, she's free as air to start again. She's got her experience gratis, and there's a mysterious flavour about her that's nearly the most enticing flavour on earth. Naturally people will talk. Let 'em. No harm in rumour. In fact, the more rumour the better." He went on with no pause. "You've not looked at me for about five hours. Look at me now and tell me you're disgusted. Tell me you're frightened."

She lifted her eyes and gazed at him for a few seconds, not smiling. Her skin tingled and crept. Then she sipped the crême de menthe and at first it tasted just like water.

"A woman wants making. Only a man can make a woman. She has to be formed. She can't do it herself. A young man may be able to do it, but he's like a teacher who swots up the night before what he has to teach the next day. And he's a fearful bungler, besides being cruel--unconsciously. Whereas an older man, a much older man--he knows! It's a unique chance for both of them. She has so much to give, and she has so much to learn. It's a fair bargain. Perhaps the woman has a little the best of it. Because after all she loses nothing that it isn't her business to lose--and the man may--well, he may kill himself. And the chance for a clever girl to be 'made' without any clumsiness! What a chance! ... Well, I won't say *which* of 'em has the best of it.... I'm speaking impartially. If you live to be as old as Ninon de l'Enclos you'll never meet a more honest man than I am."

Lilian felt intoxicated, but not with the Burgundy nor with the crême de menthe. Rather with sudden fresh air. She thought: "Be careful! Be careful! You aren't yourself. Something queer's come over you." She was not happy. She was alarmed. Once before she had been alarmed by herself, but this time she was really alarmed. She was glad that she had always despised boys of her own age. What did Mr. Grig mean by saying that a man might kill himself? She didn't know.... Yes, she knew.... She saw clearly that a woman must be formed by a man, and that until she was formed she would not be worthy of herself. She longed ardently to be formed. As she stood she was futile. She could exercise no initiative, make use of no opportunities; and her best wisdom was to remain negative--in order to avoid mistakes. Something that looked like a woman but wasn't one. She had the intelligence to realize how insipid she was. Ambition surged through her anew and with fresh power.

Mr. Grig drove her home, and the taxi was a little dark vibrating room in which they were alone together, and safe from all scrutiny. She was painfully constrained.

"Yes," said Mr. Grig, after an interminable silence. "My sister was quite right."

"What about?" Lilian asked in a child's voice.

"I'm in love. What are you going to do about it?" He turned his head impulsively towards her, gazed at her in the dim twilight of the taxi, and then kissed her. In spite of herself she yearned to give, and the yearning thrilled her.

"Please! Please!" she murmured in modest, gentle, passive protest.

Another pause.

"I shall write to you to-morrow," he said. "In the meantime, believe me, you're entirely marvellous." He was looking straight in front of him at the driver's shaggy shoulders. That was all that occurred, except the handshake.

When she let herself into the house the servant was just going upstairs to bed, after her usual sixteen-hour day.

"So you're back, miss."

"No!" thought Lilian. "It's somebody else that's come back. The girl you mean will never come back."

PART III

I
In the Hotel

Felix came quietly through the communicating door into Lilian's shuttered and close room. Between the two bedrooms was a bathroom. All the bedrooms in the hotel seemed to be designed on the same plan--too high, too long, too narrow, with the head of the bed behind the door and directly facing the window; a wardrobe, a dressing-table, a washstand, a writing-table, an easy chair (under the window), two cane chairs, a night-table, and two electric lights so devilishly arranged that they could not be persuaded to burn simultaneously; a carpet overgrown with huge, gorgeous flowers, and the walls overgrown with huge, gorgeous flowers of another but equally mirific plant. Outside the bedroom a bell rang at short intervals--all the guests in the neighbourhood performed, according to their idiosyncrasies, on the same bell--and slippered feet of servants rushing to and fro in the corridor shook the planks of Lilian's floor as they passed.

Amid the obscurity of the room Lilian's curved form, lying heaped on its side, and rather like a miniature mountain that sloped softly down towards the head and towards the feet, could be vaguely deciphered in the bed; and hillocks of attire, some pale, others coloured, some fragile and diaphanous, others resistant to the world's peering, lay dimly about on chairs and even on the writing-table. The air, exhausted by the night, had a faint and delicate odour that excited, but did not offend, Felix's nostrils.

"Is it time to get up?" Lilian murmured in the voice of a sleepy child.

"No."

Her brain slowly came to life. Flitting in and out of her happiness there were transient apprehensions--not about the morality, but about the security, of her situation. They disappeared, all except one, as soon as she looked firmly at them, because she had the most perfect confidence in Felix's good faith. The unity of the pair had begun in London, under conditions provided by Felix, who, however, did not care for them, and who had decided that he would take her away for a holiday in order that they might both reflect upon and discuss at length the best method of organizing a definite secret existence.

It was during the preliminaries to the departure that she had been specially struck by his straightforwardness. He would have no wangling with passports. She must travel as herself. She could think of no acquaintance qualified to sign the application for her passport. It was Felix's suggestion that she should go to the Putney doctor who had attended her father and mother. The pair had travelled separately on the same *train de luxe*, for which, with Felix's money, she bought her

own ticket. The cost of the ticket and the general expensiveness of the purchases which Felix insisted on her making had somewhat frightened her. He reassured her by preaching the relativity of all things. "You must alter your scale--it needs only an effort of the imagination," he had said; and explained to her his financial status. She learned that he had an independent income, and his sister another though much smaller independent income, and that the typewriting business was a diversion, though a remunerative one; also that an important cash bonus just received from an insurance policy enabled him to be profuse without straining his ordinary resources.

She had trembled at the reception office of the great hotel, but Felix, laughing at her fears, accomplished all formalities for her quite openly, and indeed the discreet incuriosity of the hotel officials fully confirmed the soundness of his attitude. Ignoring the description on the passport, he had told her to sign as "Madame," and he threw out negligently that she was his cousin. This was his sole guile. Before going upstairs he had written out a telegram and shown it to her. It was to his sister, to say that he had arrived safely and sent his love. "She has to be deceived," he murmured, "but she's got to be treated decently. It was all I could do to keep her from coming to see me off at Victoria!" He smiled. Lilian was impressed. When Lilian found that Felix's bedroom stood next to her bathroom her anxieties were renewed. Felix laughed again, and rang, for the door between the bathroom and his bedroom was locked. In a few minutes a dark and stoutish chambermaid entered with a pleasant, indulgent, comprehending gravity, and unlocked the door. "What is your name?" he asked. "Jacqueline, monsieur," she replied, and cordially accepted a twenty-franc note from him. It was all so simple, so natural, so un-English, so enheartening. In two hours they had settled down. All the embarrassing preludes to the closest intimacy had been amply achieved in London.

Lilian stretched herself voluptuously, murmured with a magnificent yawn, "Ah! How I have slept!" and, slipping out of bed, padded unshod up the room to Felix, who sat passive in the easy chair. She took the bearings of his shape in the gloom, and dropped lightly on to his knees.

"What am I sitting on?" she exclaimed, startled.

"My newspapers."

Touched by the fact that he had been waiting to read his beloved papers until she should be ready to rise, she threw her arms passionately round his neck and crushed her face into his. Daily it became clearer to her that he adored her; and yet she could scarcely believe it, because she felt so young--even childish--and so crude and insipid. She determined with a whole-souled resolve that renewed itself every hour to stop at nothing to please him.

"Do I make you happy?" she whispered almost inarticulately, her lips being

buried in his cheek.

"You do."

After a moment she sprang up, seized her thin, loose, buttonless dressing-gown, and having somehow got into it, opened the window and violently pushed back the shutters. Strong sunlight rushed blazing into the room like an army into a city long besieged and at last fallen. Millions of buoyant motes were revealed, and all the minutest details of the chamber. Lilian looked out. There were the shady gardens of the hotel, the white promenade with strolling visitors in pale costumes, the calm ultramarine Mediterranean, the bandstand far to the right emitting inaudible music, the yellow casino, beyond the casino the jetty with its group of white yachts, and, distant on either side, noble and jagged mountains, some of them snow-capped. Incredible! She heard Felix moving within the room, and turned her head.

"Darling, what are you doing?"

"Ringing for your coffee."

"What time is it?"

"Haven't the least."

"But your watch?"

"Haven't got it on."

"But you're all dressed."

"Haven't put my things in my pockets."

She clasped his arm and led him silently through the bathroom into his own bedroom, and up to the night-table, the drawer of which she pulled open. All his "things" were arranged carefully therein.

"Oh! Men are funny!" she laughed.

The number and the variety of the articles they carried in their innumerable pockets!

"*I* will put your things in your pockets," she said, and began to do so.

"Wrong!" he would protest from time to time; but he would give no positive direction, and she had to discover the proper pocket by experiment. It was a most wonderful operation, and it deliciously illustrated the exotic, incomprehensible, exquisite curiousness of men. She was proud of having thought of it, and proud of the pleasure in his face. As she glanced at the watch her brow puckered.

"I shall be frightfully late!"

"It is impossible to be late where time does not exist."

"Is that Jacqueline with my coffee?" she said, listening, and ran back to her room, pulling him after her.

Yes, she admitted she was a perfect child, but she could not help it. While she drank the coffee he put on his eyeglasses and opened the newspapers, one English, one French. She went into the bathroom.

"Felix! Felix!" she called presently from the bathroom. "Bring me in that soft towel I've left on the chair by the writing-table."

Then she returned to the bedroom and did her abundant glossy chestnut hair, and by innumerable small stages dressed. He was reading his papers, but she knew that he was also watching her, and she loved him to watch her dress, from the first stage to the last. She was too young to have anything to conceal, and his pleasure, which he tried to mask, was so obvious. He dropped *The Times* and turned to the French paper.

"Felix, do you know what?"

"What?"

"I'm frightfully ashamed of not being able to speak French. If I could only speak it a quarter as well as you do."

"That's nothing. I couldn't say two words without a Frenchman knowing instantly that I wasn't French."

"But you can talk it so quickly. Couldn't I have someone in here every morning to teach me for an hour? People do. I could get up earlier."

"Certainly not," Felix replied. "If you did you'd have something to be late for. You'd bring time into existence and spoil everything. Besides, learning French is hard work. You wouldn't learn it by instinct, as you learn clothes. And you aren't here for hard work. Learn French by all means, but not in this place. London's the place for hard work. Exercise your sense of the fitness of things, my clever girl."

She did not fully understand this philosophy, but she accepted it admiringly.

"What dress would you like me to wear, darling?" She was at the wardrobe.

"That white one."

"Then I shall have to change my stockings."

"Well, the yellow one, then. It doesn't matter."

"Of course it matters," she said with earnestness, sitting down religiously, fanatically, to change her stockings. "Don't you know that I don't want anything in the world except to please you? I only wanted to learn French so you shouldn't have to be ashamed of me."

II
The Big Yacht

After lunching to music beneath a vast parasol in the hotel garden, which looked

like a tented field, they were bowed away by servitors in black and white, and bowed into the hotel by servitors in blue and gold, and bowed along the central artery of the hotel by apprentice-servitors in scarlet, and bowed out of the hotel again on to the promenade by servitors in blue and gold. It was half-past two; the glorious sun was already slipping down; they had done absolutely nothing, and yet they had not wasted a moment; and on the faces of all the many-coloured servitors there was the smiling assurance that they had been admirably exerting themselves in full correctness, and had not a moment to waste if they honestly desired to pursue idleness as idleness ought to be pursued. Indeed, the winter day was too short for the truly conscientious.

"Your little fur?" exclaimed Felix, who was wearing his overcoat; he stopped.

"But, darling, I'm far too hot as it is!"

"In an hour the day will be gone," said he, and insisted on the treachery of the climate.

He frequently insisted on the treachery of the climate. If he happened to cough ever so slightly, he would say that the entire Riviera was bad for the throat and that a sore throat was the most dangerous complaint known to man. Lilian indulgently thought him fussy about her health and his own and the awful menaces of the exquisite climate; but she did not attribute his fussiness to his age; she regarded him as merely happening to be a bit fussy on certain matters. Nor did she regret the fussiness, for it gave her new occasions to please him and (in her heart) to condescend femininely towards him.

"I shan't need it----"

"Please! I'll fetch it, and I'll carry it. No! You stay there."

"But do you know where it is, Felix?"

"I know where it is." His voice had become very firm and somewhat tyrannic.

She stood on the pavement, put up her orange sunshade, and mused contentedly upon his prodigious care for her--proof of his passionate attachment. People were passing in both directions all the time on the broad *digue* beyond the roadway. Some strolled in complete possession of idleness; others hurried after it, with tools such as tennis rackets to help them. Nearly all, men and women, stared at her as they passed, until at length she turned round and faced the revolving door of the hotel.

"Oh! *Thank* you, dearest; you're spoiling me horribly. Do let me take it."

"I will not. Of course I am spoiling you. That is what you're here for. Your highest duty in life is to be spoiled. Let's go on the Mole."

They set off. A dark man, overdressed in striped flannels, nearly stood still at the sight of Lilian, gazing at her as though he had paid five francs for the right to do so.

"My goodness!" she muttered. "How they do stare here!"

"Why grudge them harmless enjoyment," Felix observed. "You're giving pleasure to every man that looks at you, and envy to most of the women. You're fulfilling a very valuable function in the world, If anyone is justified in objecting, I am, and I don't object. On the contrary, I'm as proud of the staring as if I'd created you. There's nothing to beat you on this coast, with your ingenuous English style of beauty, and half the pretty women here would sell their souls to look as innocent as you *look*, believe me!"

Lilian said nothing in reply. The fact was that the man simply could not open his mouth without giving her more to think about than she could manage.

At the quay they examined all the yachts, big and little, that were moored, stern on, side by side. There were three large steam yachts, and the largest of the three, with two decks and a navigating deck, all white and gold and mahogany and bunting and flowers and fluttering awnings, overpoweringly dominated the port. Felix stopped and stared at the glinting enormity.

"Is that only a yacht?" Lilian cried. "Why! It's bigger than the Channel steamer!"

"No!" said Felix, "but she's the fourth largest yacht in the world. That's the celebrated *Qita*. Crew of eighty odd. She came in last night for stores, and she's leaving again to-night, going to Naples. And here are the stores, you may depend." A lorry loaded with cases of wine drove up.

"But it's all like a fairy tale," said Lilian.

"Yes, it is. And so are you. You see, the point is that she's just about the finest of her kind. And so are you. She costs more than you to run, of course. A machine like that can't be run on less than a thousand pounds a week. Come along. Who's staring now?"

"A thousand pounds a *week*!" Lilian murmured, aghast. Her imagination resembled that of a person who, on reaching a summit which he has taken for the top of the range, sees far higher peaks beyond. And the conviction that those distant peaks were unattainable saddened her for a moment. "It's absolutely awful."

"Why awful? If you have the finest you must pay for it. A thousand a week's nothing to that fellow. Moreover, he's a British citizen, and he did splendid service for his country in the war. Among other things, he owns two of the best brands of champagne. The War Office gave him a commission and a car; and he travelled all over Europe selling his own champagne at his own price to officers' messes. After all, officers couldn't be expected to fight without the drinks they're accustomed to, could they?"

Lilian obscurely divined irony. She often wished that she could be ironical and amusing, as Felix was; but she never could. She couldn't conceive how it was done.

They reached the Mole, which was quite deserted, being off the map of cor-

rectness, and surveyed the entire scene--ships, blue water, white hotels, casino, villas, green wooded slopes all faint in the haze, and rising sharply out of the haze the lofty line of snow. In the immediate foreground, almost under their feet, was a steel collier from the north. Along the whole length of the ship carts were drawn up and cranes were creaking, and grimy ragged men hurried sweating to drop basketfuls of coal into the carts, and full carts were always departing and empty carts always coming. The activity seemed breathless, feverish and without the possibility of end--so huge was the steamer and so small were the pair-horse carts.

Two yacht's officers passed in shiny blue with gilt buttons and facings. Growled one:

"Yes, and how the hell do they expect me to keep my ship clean with this thing between me and the weather?"

"Yes," agreed the other. "How in hell do they? Why they don't make 'em unload somewhere else beats me."

Then Felix and Lilian turned seawards and watched the everlasting patience of the fishers on the rocks below.

"Better put your fur on," said Felix suddenly.

She put it on.

Returning to the quay Lilian could not keep her eyes off the superb yacht. But in a moment she bent them suddenly and quickened her pace.

"You're feeling chilly," said Felix triumphantly. "The sun's got behind the fort."

On the lower deck of the yacht, under an awning and amid easy chairs and cushions, she had seen a tall man earnestly engaged in conversation with a young and pretty girl. She thought the man was Lord Mackworth. She felt sure it was Lord Mackworth. She wanted to turn her head and make certain, but she dared not lest he should see her. She was blushing. There was nothing whatever in the brief relations between Lord Mackworth and herself to which the slightest exception could be taken by the strictest moralist. Yet she was blushing. She blushed because of the dreams she had once had concerning him. Her old, forgotten thoughts, which nobody on earth could ever have guessed, made her into a kind of criminal. It was very strange. Perhaps also she feared a little what Lord Mackworth might think of her if he saw her in that place, in those clothes, with a man much older than herself. How inexpressibly fortunate that the yacht was leaving that night! Instead of looking over her shoulder at Lord Mackworth, she looked over her shoulder at Felix, to reassure herself about her deep fondness for him and about his reliability in even the greatest crises.

"I love him," she reflected, "because he is so marvellously clever and kind and dependable and just, and because he worships me--I don't know why."

But she was devoted to him because he had picked her out of a batch and opened her eyes to the apple on the tree and made her eat it, and because she had worked and watched and suffered for him in the office, and been cast out of the office for him, and because of a funny enigmatic look in his wrinkled eyes. She would have liked him just the same if he had been cruel and undependable and had not worshipped her. And she desired ardently to be still more and more beautiful and luxurious for him, and more and more to be stared at for him, and to render him still happier and happier. She was magnificently ready to kill him with bliss.

After several hundred yards she turned round and looked at the yacht. No figures were distinguishable now on the deck. She thought captiously:

"I wonder who that doll was and what they were talking about with their heads so close together."

III
The Casino

Lilian, in a *negligé*, was somnolently stretched out in the easy chair in her room when Felix peeped in. He looked at her enquiringly in silence for a moment, and she gave him a hazy smile.

"Oh!" he said. "Then you won't feel like going into the Casino to-night after all?"

"Nothing to stop me," she replied, with a peculiar intonation, light and yet anxious.

"Hurrah!" exclaimed Felix very gaily, almost boyishly. "Then we'll go."

The apprehension which now for two days had been eating like a furtive cancer into her mind suddenly grew and contaminated the whole of her consciousness; she could not understand his levity, for she had not concealed from him the sinister misgiving.

"Yes!" she murmured with a sort of charming and victimized protest. "That's all very well, but----" And she stopped, and the smile expired from her face.

He shrugged his shoulders, gave a short, affectionate, humouring laugh, and said with kind superiority, utterly positive:

"What have I told you? The thing's absolutely imposs!"

And just as suddenly she was quite reassured and the apprehension vanished away. It could not exist against his perfect certitude. She lit up a new smile.

"Look here," he went on, "we'll dine in the Casino if we can. Of course, every blessed table may be booked, but I'll have a try."

A quarter of an hour later, when she had begun to dress, he returned with the exciting information that, at precisely the right instant, somebody had telephoned to countermand an inside table and he had secured it.

They arrived very late in the Casino restaurant, yet more diners came after them than had come before, so that ultimately it would have been difficult to draw a straight line between dinner and supper. The stars in the arched firmament of the vast and lofty hall challenged the stars of heaven in number and splendour, and seemed to win easily. Light fell in glittering floods on the flowered tables and on the shoulders of the women. In the centre of the floor was an oblong parquet sacred to dancing. The band, in which Englishmen and varied dagoes were mingled, sat, clothed apparently in surplices, on a daïs in a mighty alcove. The drummer and the banjoist each procured an unnatural union of light and sound by electric illumination of their instruments from within. The leader wore a battered opera hat, and at the end of a piece he would exclaim grimly and scornfully, "So that's that!" or, "We are the goods!" or some such phrase. Now and then the band overflowed into song, and the wild chants of the Marquesas or the Fiji Islands rang riotously through the correctness of the restaurant, and Lilian caught fragments of significant verse, such as:

"The rich get rich,
And the poor get children,
Ain't we got fun?"

showing that one touch of nature makes the Southern archipelago the very sister and bride of Europe.

The primary mission of the band was to induce a general exultant gaiety; and the mission was accomplished, nobody understood how. Lilian exulted in the food, the wine, the glitter, the noise, the wise, humorous face of Felix, and the glances which assailed her on every hand. All care fell away from her. She forgot the future, and the whole of her vitality concentrated itself intensely in the moment. Most of the conversation at neighbouring tables was in English, and it was all about gambling, dancing, golf, lawn-tennis, polo, cards, racing, trains de luxe, clothes, hotels, prices, and women. Even in the incomprehensible French gabble that reached her she could distinguish words like "golf," and "bridge," and "picnic."

Then four elegant, waisted young men appeared mysteriously from

nowhere and approached certain tables and bowed with an assured air, and instantly four elegant young women rose up, without being asked, and the professional couples began to display to the amateurs the true art of the dance. Lilian had never seen such dancing.

"Why are they all Spanish girls?" she innocently asked, struck by the rich, dark skin of the women.

"They're no more Spanish than you are," said Felix. "You perceive that one there. She's at our hotel, on our floor, and I've seen her as blonde as a Norwegian. The dark olive is the result of strange cosmetics, and a jolly fine result, too. Nothing finer has been invented for a century. It's so perverse. Don't you like it?"

"I think it's lovely!" she agreed with enthusiasm, also with a vague envy.

Later, when the senoritas had left their partners and resumed their interrupted meals, and the parquet was empty again, she said:

"I do really think it's awful, all this! It's so expensive, everything; and it's all for pleasure. The whole town's for pleasure." In the background she had a vision of her working life, with its discipline and cast-iron hours and wristlets and fatigue and privations and penury. The click of the typewriter, the green-shaded lamps, the Tube, the cold bedroom, the washing and sewing done in the cold bedroom! The blue working frock with its pathetic red line of clumsy embroidery!

"What about Margate?" Felix demanded quietly.

She was nonplussed.

"Oh! But that's different!"

"It is. It's not half as good. You must remember there's nothing new in all this. It's been going on in the Mediterranean for thousands of years, and it's likely to go on for thousands of years more. It's what human nature is. What are you going to do about it? Would you abolish luxury and pleasure? Not you. Do you imagine that God created the shores of the Mediterranean and this climate for anything else but this? What frightens you is the tremendous organization and concentration of the affair. Nothing else. And let me tell you that this town is the most interesting town on the coast just now. The fellow that's got the new concession for the casino is a bit of a genius. He's moulding the place into something fresh. It used to be the primmest place on earth. He discovered that the English don't want to be prim any more; he showed them to themselves. Do you suppose all these women began to come here on their own? They're pawns in his great game. He brought them; but no nice-minded person asks how, nor whether they really pay for their meals or their rooms, nor how they manage to encourage big gambling in the baccarat rooms. This fellow has put the wind up to the next town up the coast: it used to be the most corrupt town in the whole of Europe, that place used to be! And now the rival genius there is introducing large families of children and nurses there in the hope of persuading the English that they prefer

to be prim and domestic after all. The fact is these two geniuses are gambling against one another for far bigger stakes than any of the baccarat maniacs. It's a battle for the command of the coast. That's what it is. You don't get the hang of it all at once; but you will in time. Let's dance."

Lilian was startled by the invitation, for they had not yet danced together. She remembered how, on that night when he first talked to her about herself, he had known that she was being deprived of an evening's dancing. They stood up as the chicken was being removed. She smiled at him with fresh admiration. He had impregnated her with new ideas; he had reassured her; he had justified her enjoyment; he was amazing; he was mad about her, in his restrained style; and now he would surprisingly dance with her.

Although they took the floor early in the dance, when only two other couples had begun to dance, it was impossible for her to be nervous within his arm. Half the room gazed at her, for she had attracted attention from the first. She knew that half the room was gazing at her, and she liked it. She guessed that half the room was saying: "Look at that fresh young creature who's with that middle-aged man--she must be really very young." And she liked it. She liked to show herself with the man who was more than old enough to be her father, worn by knowledge and experience and the corrupting of the world; to contrast her untried simplicity--the bloom of the virginal scarcely gone from it--with his grey hairs and his wrinkled, disillusioned, passive eyes. She was happy in the thought that everybody knew that she must have given herself to him, and that there was something strange, sinister, and even odious in her abandonment. He had used the word "perverse." She did not wholly understand the word, but it appealed to her, and for her it expressed her mood.

She had noticed, in the room, how the women no longer unquestionably young were more consciously and carefully charming towards their men, receiving adulation but rendering it back; whereas the unquestionably young were more negligent and far more egotistic. And so she behaved like one no longer unquestionably young. She glanced up at her partner with ravishing, ecstatic smiles; she publicly adored him. And she was glad that her green and gold frock with its long arm-holes was not of the Wigmore Street cut, but quite other in origin and spirit and in its effect upon the imagination.

The dancing had by this time become general, but the olive-tinted temptresses were still prominent in the throng, and sometimes she touched them in the curves of the dance. She knew where they beat her and where she beat them. And it was vouchsafed to her from the eyes of Felix that she was lovely and marvellous. She felt intensely, inexpressibly happy, and more than happy--triumphant. Her quiet, obstinate resentment against the domestic policy of her father died out, and she forgave him as she danced. She thought with a secret sigh

almost painful in its relief:

"Thank God I have fulfilled myself and succeeded not too late!"

She had premonitions of power, a foretaste of dominion. Felix was hers. She could influence him. She could re-make him. And for the thousandth time she breathed to him in her soul: "I have made you happy, but I will make you more happy--infinitely more happy. You don't know yet what I am capable of." He danced very correctly and quite nicely,--rather stiff, of course, but with a certain clever abandonment of his body to the rhythm. She thought: "With what women did he learn to dance? He must have danced a lot. Never will I ask! Never!" The fox-trot ended.

As they were crossing the floor to their table she saw Lord Mackworth dining with a man older than himself at a table near the windows. She sat down to the sweet. He had caught sight of her and was looking at her fixedly. She stared at him for a moment with the casually interested stare of non-recognition, perfectly executed.

"The yacht hasn't left, then, after all," she reflected, and to Felix: "Did that big yacht leave to-night?"

"No," said Felix. "I heard they'd changed their minds." Felix had the faculty of hearing everything.

In spite of herself Lilian was disturbed.

IV
Chemin de Fer

When Felix said that of course they must visit the baccarat rooms she vaguely acquiesced. A mood of the old apprehension had mysteriously succeeded her exultation; she wanted to exorcise it and couldn't. She would have tried to dance the gloom away, but Felix did not suggest another dance; she understood that he had danced once because it was proper for an enlightened amateur of life to forgo no sensation, and that he would not dance again unless asked. She would not ask. He had given her a cigarette and a liqueur; she had accepted a second liqueur and then declined it, afraid of it and anxious for her reputation in his eyes. There were formalities to accomplish at the entrance to the baccarat rooms--forms to be filled up and money to be paid.

"They make a small charge for emptying your pockets," said Felix. "They pretend to be rather particular about their victims."

The select rooms were crowded. Every table in the blazing interior had round it a thick ring of sitters and standers, and many people were walking to and fro, disappointed or hopeful. By tiptoeing and supporting herself on Felix's shoulder Lilian could just see the green cloth of a table, like the floor of a pit whose walls were bodies elegant in evening dress; it was littered with white, rose, and green counters, banknotes, cards, ash-trays, cigarette cases, and vanity bags. More women were seated than men. A single croupier dominated and ruled the game. Cards and counters were thrown about from side to side.

"It seems frightfully exciting," murmured Lilian, scarcely audible, into the ear of Felix.

"It is," said Felix gruffly. "It's the real thing, you know, gambling is. When people lose they lose real money, and when they win, ditto. You can genuinely ruin yourself here. There's no sham about it. You may go out without even your fare home." He offered these remarks separately, between considerable pauses.

"Is baccarat easy to learn?"

"Very. But not here--and this isn't baccarat. This is *chemin de fer*--equally easy, though. I'll get a pack of cards at the hotel and teach you. It's *chemin de fer* at every table. I suppose that's why they call the rooms 'baccarat'?"

He was edging nearer the croupier. A stout, middle-aged woman whose flesh seemed to be insecurely and inadequately confined within frail silk rose from her chair, gathering up bag and cigarette case--all that remained to her.

"Sit down here and keep the chair for me," Felix said sharply, and pushed Lilian into the seat.

Everybody gazed at her, and her constraint showed the conviction that everybody guessed she had never sat at a gaming-table before. Felix had vanished, and she was thrown with her arresting, innocent beauty upon the envious and jealous world. He had gone to exchange notes for counters, but she did not know. After a moment that was an hour he returned and took the seat.

"You stand behind me and watch," said he. "And when you get bored walk about and see things for yourself, and when you need moral support again come and put your hand on my chair. I'll stop playing whenever you tell me." He spoke in a muttering voice, but three or four persons around could not fail to catch every word; this, however, appeared not to trouble him.

Lilian was in a state of high excitation, but she was also extremely confused, the game being a complete enigma to her. The croupier was continually raking cards to and fro and counters to and fro, continually tearing tickets out of a book, ripping them to pieces and throwing the pieces behind him, continually dropping cards into a big hole, and continually dropping counters into a little hole. An

official opposite the croupier, with pockets full of counters, was continually, and with miraculous rapidity, exchanging rose counters for green and white counters for rose. The player next to Felix had a small table behind him furnished with champagne and sandwiches, which he consumed in hasty gulps and mouthfuls, as one who feels the dread hour at hand when no man may eat or drink. The players ejaculated short incomprehensible words, and at brief intervals Lilian seized a word that sounded like "baunco." She heard Felix utter the word, saw him turn up two cards, and then receive from the croupier's rake a large assortment of green and rose counters. He never looked at her to smile; she was ignored, but she guessed that he must be winning. Soon afterwards his piles of counters had strangely diminished.

The heat stifled her, and the odour of flesh and tobacco and scent nauseated. She held no key to the vast and splendid conundrum, unless by chance her fundamental commonsense was right in its casual suggestion that she was surrounded by lunatics. Yet how could persons so well-dressed, so sure of themselves, so restrained and stylish in manner, and seemingly so wealthy, be lunatics? Impossible! She grew profoundly and inexplicably sad.

At length she walked away, aimless. Felix did not notice her departure. She thought it almost certain that Lord Mackworth would be somewhere in the rooms; she desired above everything to avoid the danger incident to meeting him face to face; but she walked away. All the tables were the same as the table at which she had left Felix--crowded, entranced, self-concentrated and perfectly unintelligible; and at every table the croupier was continually dropping counters into a little hole, and tearing up tickets and throwing the fragments behind him on to the crimson carpet. The sole difference between the tables was that some held more banknotes than others. The heaps of blue thousand-franc notes piled about one table caused Lilian to halt and gaze.

"Some ready there!" said a very young man to a fierce old woman.

"Ah! But you should have seen it in the days of gold plaques before the war. You could call a hundred-franc gold piece 'ready,' then, if you like." The old woman sighed grimly.

Lilian passed on under their combined stare. She glimpsed herself in mirrors, as once she used to glimpse herself in the shop windows of Bond Street, and was satisfied with the vision. Her walk was as remarkable as her beauty. Yes, she knew how to put her feet on the ground and how to make her body float smoothly and evenly above the moving limbs. Her spirit rose as she began to suspect that no woman in the rooms was getting more notice than herself. Fancy Felix being absorbed in his gambling! She had forgotten Lord Mackworth; she had decided that he was not in the rooms; and then suddenly, sprung from nothingness like a ghost, he stood in her path between the wall and the end of a table. She was

disposed to retreat; besides, his attention was fixed on the table and she might get by him unperceived. But just as she approached he turned. Although she might have ignored him, and in the circumstances was indeed entitled to do so, she did not because she could not. She blushed, only slightly, acknowledged their acquaintance with a faint smile, then stopped, but did not advance her hand to meet his.

"Ought I to have shaken hands?" she thought anxiously. All her quickly acquired worldliness of manner left her in an instant. She was the typewriting girl again, wearing the wristlets. He had all the physical splendour that she remembered, and the style, and the benignant large-hearted tolerance of an extensive sinner. As he looked at her he drew back his chin and made several chins of it in just the old way. He was enormous, superb, and perfect. And if not a boy he had real youth; once more she had to contrast his youth with Felix's specious sprightliness. She fought on behalf of Felix in her mind, and on points Felix won; but in her mind Lord Mackworth had supporters which derided all reasoning. And as she fronted him the old frightful apprehension was powerfully revived, and it seemed to be building a wall between her and the young man, and she was intensely dejected beneath the brightness of her demeanour.

"Very hot here, isn't it?" she was saying. ("A stupid typewriting girl remark," she reflected as it slipped out.)

"A great change since I was here last just before the war," said Lord Mackworth gaily.

"Warmer, do you mean?"

"No! Much more cheery now. Jollier!" He waved a hand towards the company in general.

"Oh, *that*!" said Lilian, marshalling all her forces in a determined effort to lose the typewriting girl in the woman of the world. "You mean the company." She shrugged her shoulders, borrowing some of his tolerance, "Of course, you know they've been brought here on purpose. It's all part of a great battle for the command of the coast."

The effort succeeded beyond her hopes. Lord Mackworth was clearly impressed; he put questions which Lilian answered out of the mouth of Felix. Strange that this man should be he who had inexcusably omitted to pay his trumpery bill at Clifford Street, the man through whose unconscious agency she had been unjustly cast into the street! However, the past did not in the least affect her feeling for him. What she most vividly recalled was that she had striven to serve him and had served him. He made no reference--doubtless from delicacy--to the night of their meeting; nor did he betray even the very smallest surprise at seeing her, the typewriting girl, exquisitely and expensively dressed, in the finest baccarat rooms on the Riviera. (Of course, she might be married, or have inherited

a fortune--he could think as he chose.)

They went on talking and then a pause came, and Lord Mackworth said bluntly:

"I saw you from the yacht this afternoon."

"Oh! What yacht?"

"The *Qita*."

"The big one? Is it yours?"

"Oh lord, no! She belongs to my friend Macmusson--we dined together here to-night."

"It must be terribly big. I suppose you have an enormous party on board?"

"Not a bit. Only Macmusson and his three old aunts, and his niece--adopted daughter. Nobody else."

"That's the girl you were making love to," Lilian's heart accused him. "She's going to be very rich and she'll pay all your family debts. That's what it is. But what difference does it make?" her heart added, "You are you." And aloud: "I heard the yacht was leaving to-night."

"She was. But I persuaded old Macmusson to stop another day."

"Really!"

"And do you know why?"

"No."

"Because I had some hope of meeting you here to-night."

She flushed again. She saw the ante-room at Clifford Street at the moment when he came back to ask her to wake him by telephone. He must have been well aware, then, that he had made a conquest, because in the ante-room she had not been able to hide her soft emotion. From that moment he had forgotten her; yet he could not have forgotten her. Perhaps he had somehow been prevented from meeting her in the meantime. Now at the mere second sight of her he had stopped the great yacht on the chance of talking to her! He had thrown over the young rich girl at a single glimpse of Lilian as she passed! It was astounding. But in fact she was not astounded. She glanced up at him. His smooth, handsome red face was alive with admiration. And was she not really to be admired, even by the Lord Mackworths? Was she not marvellous? Did not all the company in the rooms regard her as marvellous? She thrilled to the romance of the incredible event. He was so young and big and strong and handsome; he had such prestige in her eyes. She saw visions.

But the frightful apprehension--no longer a wall, rather a cloud--swallowed up the visions and froze the thrill. Felix held her. A gust of ruthless common sense inspired her to say primly:

"It's always dangerous to give reasons for what one's done." And, nodding,

she left him. Immediately afterwards she had to sit down.

V
In the Hills

When she at length returned to Felix and, squeezing through the outer rings of gladiators against chance, touched him delicately on the shoulder, he faced her with a bright youthful smile, and without any surprise--it was plain to her that he had recognized her from the light touch of her finger.

"Do you want me to stop?"

She nodded.

He gathered his counters together and rose with alacrity.

"You came in the nick of time," he said. "But, of course, you would! I've been playing wild and I've made a thousand francs into rather more than six thousand. It was the very moment to flee from the wrath that was coming. Let's run, run, to the change-desk before I change my mind and decide to begin to lose. That's the only insurance--getting rid of the counters, because when you've got rid of 'em you're too ashamed with yourself to get more."

He was quite uplifted, so gaily preoccupied with his achievement that he noticed nothing strange in her mien. She was glad that he noticed nothing; and yet also she was sorry; she would have liked him, after a single glance at her, to have said in his curt, quiet, assured manner: "What's wrong?"

She kept thinking, but not of Felix: "He must be very fickle and capricious. I'm certain he was making love to *her*. He happens to see me and off he runs after me! He can't be any good, with his debts and things. I was right to give him the bird. But he's terribly nice, and I don't care. I don't know what on earth's the matter with me. I think I must be a bit mad, and always was. If I wasn't, should I be here?"

Transiently she viewed herself as, for example, Gertie Jackson would have viewed her. And then she saw another and a worse self and viewed that other self as Lilian the staid and constant friend of Felix would naturally view such an abandoned girl. She was afraid of and disgusted by the possibilities discovered in the depths of her own mind.

At the desk the dancing girl whom Felix had indicated as inhabiting their

hotel hurried up passionately and forestalled them. She threw down two green counters, as it were in anger.

"Can I play with *that*!" she exclaimed in cockney English.

The changer handed her two hundred-franc notes, which she crumpled in her hand.

"I must find a hundred thousand francs from somewhere!" she cried, departing. She was talking to herself. As she moved away a stout, oldish man with a thick lower lip, pearl studs in his shirt-front, and a gleaming white waistcoat, joined her, and they disappeared together.

Lilian stared after her in amazement. Felix's winnings suddenly seemed very insignificant. Still when he received six fine fresh thousand-franc notes, besides some small notes, in exchange for valueless discs, and handed to her one of the fine fresh notes--"That's for saving me from myself!"--she was impressed anew. A palace of magic, the baccarat rooms! The real thing, gambling!

"What do you want to do now?" he asked. "Dance? No? Well, I'll do anything you like, anything, the most absurd thing. Is that talking?"

They were moving somewhat aimlessly down the grand staircase.

"Felix, darling," she murmured, "let's go for a motor run in the hills. There's a lovely moon. I should so love it." She desired to be alone with him precisely as she had been alone with him in the taxi after their first dinner. She had a fancy for just that and nothing else. She pictured them together in the car, in the midst of gigantic nature and in the brilliant night.

"But it will be cold!" he protested.

"It wasn't cold when we came in here--it was quite warm--you said so," she replied softly. "But just as you please. I don't mind." And into the acquiescent charm of her voice she dropped one drop of angelic resentment--one single drop; not because he objected to gratifying her, but because she knew he was merely fussing himself about his throat and his health generally.

"We'll go, by all means. It won't take long," he yielded affectionately, without reserve.

She pressed his arm. She had won. He began to suspect that she was overwrought--perhaps by the first sight of the spectacle of gambling on a great scale--and he soothed her accordingly. Half a dozen automobiles were waiting and willing to take them into the hills.

Before Lilian had regained full possession of herself they were clear of the town, and continually ascending, in long curves. The night was magnificent; through the close-shut windows of the car could be seen, not the moon, which was on high, but the strong moonlight and sharp shadows, and the huge austere contours of the hills; and here and there a distant, steady domestic lamp. Lilian sat in her corner and Felix in his, and a space separated them because of the width

of the car. She felt a peculiar constraint and could not reach the mood she wanted.

"Felix," she said, "you heard that girl say she must have a hundred thousand francs, how will she get it? How can she get it?"

"She'll just disappear for a day or two, and then she'll come back with it. I dare say she owes most of it already to the casino."

"But who will give it her?"

"Ah! That's her secret. There's always somebody in the background that these charmers have made themselves indispensable to. When this particular charmer tackles the particular man or men that she's indispensable to, she'll have what she needs out of them if they've got it to give. That's a certainty. If a man has hypnotized himself into the belief that a girl's body is paradise, he'll win paradise and keep paradise. He'll steal, commit murder, sell his wife and children, abandon his parents to the workhouse; there's nothing he won't do. And he'll do it even if she'll only let him kiss her feet. Of course, all men aren't like that, but there are quite a few of 'em, and these charmers always find 'em out. Trust them."

"I couldn't see that there was anything very extraordinary in her."

"Neither could I. But perhaps we're blind to what that fellow who's going to fork out the hundred thousand francs sees. I dare say if I were to dance with her I might have glimpses of his notion of her. Anyhow, you bet she's a highly finished product; she's got great gifts and great skill--must have--and she knows exactly what she's about--and she looks eighteen and isn't above twenty-five. You must remember she's on the way to being a star in the most powerful profession in the world. They've made practically all the history there is, even in the East, and they're still making it--making it this very night."

There was a considerable silence, and then Lilian shot across the seat and leaned heavily against Felix and clasped his neck.

"Darling," she said, "I know I'm going to have a baby!"

They could just see each other. Felix paused before replying.

"Very well! Very well," he said calmly. "We shall see who's right." Her thoughts concerning Lord Mackworth now seemed utterly incredible to her in their mad aberration.

The next moment the car swerved unexpectedly to the side of the mounting road and the engine stopped; the chauffeur jumped down, opened the bonnet, unstrapped one of the side lamps and peered with it into the secrets under the bonnet. Felix, loosing himself from Lilian, rapped sharply on the front window, but got no response from the bent chauffeur. Then impatiently he tried to let down the window and could not. He lifted it, shook it, rattled it, broke the fragile fastening of the strap. Suddenly the window fell with a bang into its slit, and there was a tinkling of smashed glass.

"Damn it! I ought to have opened the door, but I was afraid of too much

cold."

The icy air of the hills rushed like an assassin into the interior of the car, Felix shivered, unlatched the door and got out. The chauffeur proved to be an Italian, with no more French than sufficed to take orders and receive fares and tips. He could give no intelligible explanation of the breakdown, but he smiled optimistically. The car was absolutely alone on the road, and the road was alone in the vast implacable landscape. No light anywhere, except the chilly, dazzling moon and the stars, and the glitter of a far range of god-like peaks, whence came the terrible wind. The scene and situation intimidated. The inhuman and negligent grandeur of nature was revealed. Felix returned into the car and shut the door, but could not shut out the cold. Lilian covered his chest with her warm bosom. Gently he pushed her away.

"No, no!"

"Let me, darling!"

"It's no use. I shall suffer for this."

After a few minutes the engine was throbbing again, and they had begun the descent. But no device could conjure away the ruthless night air. Back at the hotel Felix took brandy and hot water, accepted Lilian's hot water bag in addition to his own, and was in bed and thickly enveloped in no time at all. Lilian kissed him guiltily and left him. He bade her good night kindly but absently, engrossed in himself.

VI
The Benefactress

When Lilian was alone in her room she thought anxiously:

"Supposing he should want more brandy in the night--there is none!"

The travelling flask was now empty. (In the emergency, hot water from the lavatory-basin tap had been used to dilute the brandy. Felix having said impatiently that any water would do so long as it was hot--hang a few germs!) She had noticed that he would always take a little brandy if he felt unwell from whatever cause, and this habit caused her no uneasiness, for from her father she had acquired a firm belief in the restorative qualities of brandy; even her mother would say how unwise it was to "be without" brandy, and before starting for the annual domestic holiday invariably attended herself to the provision of it. The lack of

brandy settled upon Lilian's mind, intensifying somehow her sense of guilt. She felt deeply the responsibilities of the situation, which became graver and graver to her--the more so as she had no real status to deal with it.

She wanted to ring the bell, but the bell was within a few yards of Felix's door--he often complained on this score--and to ring might be to wake him. Cautiously she stepped into the corridor, hoping to find Jacqueline in the service-room at the end of the shabby little side corridor where the bell and the room-indicator were. She knew the French for brandy. The main corridor stretched away with an effect of endlessness. In its whole length only two electric lights had been left to burn. Solitude and silence made it mysteriously solemn. A pair of boots, or two pairs of boots--one large, one small and dainty--here and there on a door-mat seemed inexplicably to symbolize the forlornness of humanity in the sight of the infinite. The beating of Lilian's heart attracted her attention. Not without an effort could she cross the magic and formidable corridor. The door of the service-room was locked. No hope! Even Jacqueline had a bed somewhere and was asleep in it; and brandy was as unattainable as on a coral island.

Lilian felt the rough hair-lining of pleasure. The idea of her insecurity frightened her. She perceived that a life of toil, abstinence, deprivation and cold virginity had its advantages. Of course, Felix was not going to be ill; but if he were, and if her dreadful fears about her own condition were realized--what then? What would happen? Were the moral maxims and strict practice of her parents after all horribly true? The wages of sin, and all that sort of thing ... She heard steps in the distance of the corridor. She peeped. Somebody was approaching. Had she time to cross and vanish into the shelter of her room? She hesitated. The visitant was a woman. It was the girl who in the baccarat rooms had talked of a hundred thousand francs in a cockney accent, the girl whom Felix had described as probably a rising star in the most powerful of professions. She too had a bed, and was seeking it at last.

"I expect there's no chance of getting hold of a servant to-night," said Lilian meekly, as the girl instinctively paused in passing.

The girl, staring sharply out of her artificially enlarged eyes, shrugged the shoulders of negation at Lilian's simplicity.

"Anything the matter?"

"I only wanted some brandy. My"--'husband' she meant to say, but could not frame the majestic word--"my friend's not very well. Chill. He's had a very little brandy, and might need some more in the night." She flushed.

"Come along of me. I'll let you have some." What a harsh, rasping little voice!

The benefactress's bedroom was in a state of rich disorder that astounded Lilian. The girl turned on every light in the chamber, banged the door, and push-

ing some clothes off a chair told Lilian to sit down. Drawers were open, cupboards were open, the wardrobe was open. Attire, boxes, bottles, parcels, candles, parasols, illustrated comic papers, novels with shiny coloured covers were strewn everywhere; and in a corner a terrific trunk stood upright. The benefactress began ferreting in drawers, and slamming them to one after another.

"I'm afraid I'm putting you to a lot of trouble," said Lilian. "You're very kind, I'm sure."

"Not a bit of it. I never *can* find anything.... I think us girls ought to stand by each other, that's what I think. Not as we ever do!" Her voice seemed to thicken, almost to break.

Lilian felt as if the entire hotel had trembled under her feet, but she gave no sign of shock; she desired the brandy, if it was to be had. "Us girls"!

"You *are* French, aren't you? I only ask because you speak English so well."

After a moment the girl replied, her head buried in a drawer:

"You bet I'm French. My mother sent me to a convent in London so as I could learn English properly. It was one of them boarding convents where you're free to do what you like so long as you're in by seven o'clock. They wanted a few French girls for the chorus of a revue at the Pavilion. Soon as I got in there I never went back to the convent, and I've never seen ma since, either. I was in that chorus for a year. Oh!" She produced an ingenious and costly travelling spirit-case, and then searched for the key of it.

"I wish I could speak French half as well as you speak English."

"If I had half your face and your figure I'd give all my English to anybody that cared to have it. Oh! Damn the key! Excuse me. Here you are." She offered the disengaged flask. "Now you go along and take what you want, and bring me the flask back."

She stood in front of Lilian, who rose. She was as flat as Milly Merrislate, and neither tall nor graceful. Every lineament of the pert face so heavily masked in paint and powder, every gesture, the too bright stockings, the gilded shoes, the impudent coiffure, the huge and flashy rings, the square-dialled wrist-watch--all were crudely symptomatic of an ingrained and unalterable vulgarity. Lilian was absolutely unable to understand how any man, however coarse and cynical, could find any charm of any kind in such a girl. But Lilian did not know that intense vulgarity is in itself irresistible to certain amateurs of women, and she was far too young really to appreciate the sorcery of mere lithe youthfulness.

"Why! What is it?" Lilian exclaimed, as she took the flask.

Tears were ravaging the cheeks of the benefactress.

"Oh! Damn!" The benefactress stamped her foot, and raised her thin, loose, bare shoulders. "Gambling's it. I always lose here. It's all shemmy here, and when you win at shemmy you take other people's money, not the bank's, and that puts

me off like at the start. And you never win if you don't feel as if you were going to. I was at Monte Carlo last week, and you sh'd've seen me at roulette, taking the casino money. I couldn't do wrong. But I had to come back here, and there you are! Lost it all and a lot more!" She was speaking through her tears. "Cleaned out to-night! Naked! You see, it's like this. Gambling gives you an emotion. It's the only thing there is for that--I mean for me.... Did you see that fat beast speak to me to-night in the casino? Well, he said something to me and offered me ten thousand francs, and I slapped his face for him in the entrance-hall. He knew I was stony. I was a fool. Why shouldn't I have done what he wanted? What's it matter? But no! I'm like that, and I slapped his face, and I'd do it again, I would!! He's Scapini, you know, the biggest shareholder in both the big hotels here. I tore it, I did! And, would you believe, I'd no sooner got in here afterwards than the manager told me I must leave to-morrow morning. It was all over the place as quick as that! I've only got to go to Paris to get all the money I want. Yes. But I'd sell myself for a year to be able to pay my bill straight off in the morning and cheek 'em. It'll be near a thousand francs, and I haven't got ten francs, besides having the whole bally town against me." She laughed and threw her head back. "Here! You go along. Don't listen to me. It's not the first time, neither the last. Go along now."

"I'm very sorry," said Lilian. She simply could not conceive that the girl, possibly no older than herself, was standing alone and unaided against what was to her the universe. How could these girls do it? What was the quality in them that enabled them to do it?

She was in the intimidating, silent, mystery-hiding corridor again. She listened at the door, which she had left ajar, between the bathroom and Felix's bedroom. No sound! In the solacing, perfect tidiness of her room, she poured some of the brandy into a glass, and then, taking her bag, returned to the benefactress.

"Here's your flask, thank you very much!" she said. "And here's a thousand francs, if it's any use to you." She produced the note which Felix had given to her. The money was accepted, greedily.

"If you're here in a week's time, in five days, you'll have it back," said the benefactress, looking at her wrist-watch. "No! It's too late to go and play again now!" She giggled. "Tell me your name. You can trust *me*. I don't believe you're real, though! You couldn't be. There aren't such girls--anyhow at your age." She stopped, and gave a tremendous youthful sigh. "Ah!" she exclaimed, "if only I was dead. I often dream of lying in my grave--eternal peace, eternal peace! No emotions! No men! Quite still! Stretched straight out! Quiet for ever and ever! Eternal peace! D'you know I've been like that all my life? My God!"

Lilian burst into tears, agonized. The original benefactress flung herself at the other benefactress with amazing violence, and they kissed, weeping.

A quarter of an hour later the defier of Scapini murmured:

"I wish to heaven I could do something for *you*!"

Lilian answered:

"I wish you'd tell me how you stain your skin that lovely Spanish colour."

And she immediately received, not merely the instructions, but the complete materials necessary for the operation.

VII
The Doctor

When she awoke the next morning after a very few hours' sleep, she did so suddenly, to a full consciousness of her situation, and not little by little, passing by gradual stages to realization, as was her wont. She listened; no sound came through the two half-open doors. The brandy had not been needed. Perhaps he was asleep; perhaps he had had a good night and was perfectly restored. She rose, unfastened the window and very quietly pushed back the shutters. It was raining. Just as she was, her hair loose and the delicate and absurd rag of a nightdress all untied, she surveyed herself sternly in the mirror. She was well content with her beauty. Impossible to criticize it! In every way she was far more beautiful than the nameless woman whom she had befriended and who had befriended her.

Partly because she had been generous to her, she felt sympathy for the girl. The phrase "us girls" stung her still, but it was not ill meant; in fact, it was a rather natural phrase, and no doubt already her acquaintance must have perceived how wrong it was. She admired the girl for her fierce defiance and courage, and for the intense passion with which she had desired the grave. "Stretched straight out! Quiet for ever and ever!" Startling and outrageous words, in that harsh young voice; but there was something fine about them! ("I may say the same one day soon," Lilian thought solemnly.) Moreover, she understood better the power of the girl, whose kiss and clasp had communicated to her a most disconcerting physical thrill. Indeed, it seemed to her that she was on the threshold of all sorts of new comprehensions. Finally she had astonished the girl by the grand loan; she had shone; she had pleased; she had satisfied her instinct to give pleasure. She thought:

"She may be stronger than I am, and cleverer; but she is very silly and I am

not. And I'm not weak either, even if some people take me for weak."

It was disturbing, though, how that phrase pricked and pricked: "Us girls." Little flames shot up from the ashes of her early and abandoned religion. "The wages of sin--the wages of sin." Was it true about the wages of sin? Was she to be punished? The great, terrible fear of conception still dominated her soul; and it grew hourly. At each disappointing dawn the torture of it increased. She saw the powders and preparations which the courtesan had given her; she recalled the minute directions for the use of them, and smiled painfully. How could the prospective mother employ such devices? Nevertheless, if she escaped, she would employ them as soon as Felix was better. She knew that Felix would delight in the perverse, provocative transformation, and she yearned to gratify him afresh in a novel manner. When the surprise came upon him he would pretend that it was nothing; but he would be delighted, he would revel in it.

Putting on her peignoir she slipped noiselessly into the other bedroom, and crept up to the bed. Needless precaution; Felix was wide awake, staring at the ceiling. Before speaking she tenderly kissed him, and kept her face for a moment on his.

"Better?"

"Had an awful night. Couldn't sleep a wink. I won't get up just yet. Order me tea instead of coffee. We'll go out after lunch, not before."

"Do you think you ought to go out, dearest?"

"Of course I ought to go out," he snapped peevishly.

"It's raining."

"Oh, well, if it's raining I dare say I shan't want to go out." He placed his hand nervously on his right breast.

"Does it hurt you?"

"Not at all. Can't I touch myself?"

She kissed him again. Then he gazed at her with love, as she moved over him to ring the bell.

"You all right?"

"Oh, splendid! I listened once or twice at the door, but as I didn't hear anything I made sure you were asleep."

She kept silence about her awful, persistent fear, knowing that any reference to it would only irritate him. He was more than ever like a child--and a captious child. She realized the attitude of his sister towards him. Thank God he was better! If he had fallen ill she would have condemned herself as a criminal for life, for her insane, selfish suggestion of an excursion to the hills at night. Not he, but she, was the child.

After his tea he did get up and dress; but he would not descend to lunch; nor eat in the bedroom. At three o'clock he said that when it rained on the Riviera

the climate was the most damnable on earth, and that he preferred to be in bed. And to bed he returned. Then Lilian noticed him fingering his breast again.

"Any pain there?"

"Oh! Nothing. Nothing. Only a sort of sensation."

Soon afterwards he gave a few very faint, short, dry coughs--scarcely perceptible efforts to clear the throat. And at the same Lilian went cold. She knew that cough. She had helped to nurse her father. It was the affrighting pneumonia cough. Almost simultaneously it occurred to her that Felix was trying to hide from her a difficulty in breathing. She had not dreamed of anything so bad as pneumonia, which for her was the direst of all diseases. And she with a plan for dyeing her skin to amuse and excite him! ... She had thought of a severe chill at the worst.

She hurried downstairs to see the concierge. The lift was too slow in coming up for her; she had to run down the flights of carpeted steps one after another. The main question on her mind was: "Ought I to telegraph to his sister?" If Miss Grig arrived, what would, what could happen to herself? The concierge--a dark, haughty, long-moustached, somewhat consumptive subject--adored Lilian for her beauty, and she had rewarded his worship with exquisite smiles and tones.

"Would you like the English doctor, madam?" said he.

"*Is* there an English doctor here?" She was immensely relieved. She would be able to talk to an English doctor, whereas a French doctor with his shrugs and science, and understanding nothing you said....

"Surely, madam! I will telephone at once, madam. He shall be here in one quarter hour. I know where he is. He is a very good doctor."

"Oh, thank you!" Concierges were marvellous persons.

As soon as she had gone again the concierge made all the pages tremble. It was the thwarted desire to kneel at Lilian's feet and kiss her divine shoes that caused him to terrorize the pages.

As for telegraphing to Miss Grig, she decided that obviously she could send no message till the doctor had examined and reported. In regard to the hotel authorities and servants she now had no shame. She alone was responsible for Felix's welfare, and she would be responsible, and they must all think what they liked about her relations with him. She did not care.

The concierge was indeed marvellous, for in less than twenty minutes there was a knock at Felix's door. Lilian opened, saw a professional face with hair half sandy, half grey, and, turning to Felix, murmured:

"It's the doctor, darling."

Felix, to whom she had audaciously said not a word about sending for a doctor, actually sat up, furious.

"I'm not going to see a doctor," he gasped. "I'm not going to see any doctor."

"Come in, doctor, please."

The moment was dramatic. Felix of course was beaten.

"You'll find me in the next room, doctor," she said, after a minute, and the doctor bowed. In another ten minutes the doctor entered her bedroom.

"It's a mild attack of pneumonia," said he, standing in front of her. "Very mild. I can see no cause for anxiety. You'd better have a nurse for the night."

"I would sooner sit up myself," Lilian answered. "I've nursed pneumonia before."

"Then have a nurse for the day," the doctor suggested. "I can get an English one from the Alexandra Hospital--a very good one. She might come in at once and stay till ten o'clock, say." Then he proceeded to the treatment, prescriptions, and so on.... An English nurse!

Lilian felt extraordinarily grateful and reassured. She knew where she was now. She was in England again.

"Ought I to telegraph home?" she asked.

"I shouldn't if I were you," the doctor replied. "Better to wait for a day or two. Telegrams are so disturbing, aren't they?"

His gentle manner was inexpressibly soothing. It was so soothing that just as he was leaving she kept him back with a gesture.

"Doctor, before you go, I wish you would do something for me." And she sat down, her face positively burning and shed tears.

In the night, as she sat with Felix, the patient's condition unquestionably improved. He even grew cheerful and laudatory.

"You're a great girl," he muttered weakly but firmly. "I know I was most absurdly cross, but I'm a rotten invalid."

She looked at him steadily, and, her secret resolve enfeebled by his surprising and ravishing appreciation, she let forth, against the dictates of discretion, the terrific fact which was overwhelming her and causing every fibre in her to creep.

"It's true what I told you."

"What?"

"You know----" (A pause.)

"How do you know it's true?"

"The doctor----"

His reception of the tidings falsified every expectation. He waited a moment, and then said calmly:

"That's all right. I'll see to that."

She did not kiss him, but, sitting on the bed, put her head beside his on the pillow. Seen close, his eyelashes appeared as big as horsehairs and transcendently masculine. She tasted the full, deep savour of life then, moveless, in an awkward posture, in the midst of the huge sleeping hotel. She had no regrets, no past, only

a future.

VIII
Marriage

Lilian went to bed in the morning, not only with the assurance that Felix was in no danger, but with his words echoing in her heart: "We shall get married--here--the moment I'm fit." She was nursing his body; he was nursing her mind. He had realized at once, of course, that the situation was completely altered, and that he had now one sole duty--his duty towards her. And, moreover, he had cared for her pride--had not used the least word or even inflection to indicate that she was absolutely dependent on his good nature. The very basis of his attitude towards her was that he and she were indivisible in the matter. She rose about two o'clock, and she had scarcely got out of bed when the Irish nurse, Kate O'Connor, tapped at her door, and having received permission to enter, came in with a conspiratorial air.

"I heard you stirring. He's going on splendidly," said the glinting-eye Kate, clad from head to foot in whitest white. "But he sent me out of the room after we'd had our little talk with Dr. Samson, and the doctor stayed some while afterwards. Then there came another gentleman--French gentleman--and I was sent out again. He told me not to say anything to you, and I promised I wouldn't; but naturally I must tell you."

Lilian thanked her undisturbed, guessing that Felix was at work upon the arrangements for the marriage. In the night he had asked her: "Where were you born? What parish?" And on her inquiring why he wanted to know he had replied casually: "Oh, it's nothing. Just curiosity." But she had not been deceived. She understood him--how he loved to plan and organize their doings by himself, saying naught.

The fact was that he had been asking the doctor about local lawyers, and, having learned what he desired, he had sent for the most suitable *avoué*, and put into his hands all the business of the marriage of two British subjects in a French town. Apparently, as he had foreseen, the chief documents required were the birth certificates of himself and Lilian, and he had telegraphed for these to his own solicitor in London.

Lilian continued to receive no information concerning the progress of the

formalities, and she sought for none. She lived in a state of contemplation. Her anxieties, except the vague, wonderful, and semi-mystical anxiety of far-off motherhood had been dissipated. She was uplifted; she had a magnificent sense of responsibility, which gave her a new dignity, gravity and assurance. Kate O'Connor called her "madam," and referred to her as "madam," especially when speaking to Felix. The assumption underlying the behaviour of everybody was that she was Felix's wife. As for the French lawyer, she never even saw him.

Meanwhile Felix's recovery was unexpectedly slow, and he went through several slight relapses. Now and then his voice was suddenly become hoarse and faint, and with the same suddenness it resumed the normal. At length he grew cantankerous. The two women were delighted, telling each other that this crotchetiness was a certain sign of strength. One day he got up and dressed fully and sat at the window for half an hour, returning to bed immediately afterwards. The same evening he convinced Lilian that there was no more need for her to watch through the night.

The next morning when Lilian entered his room the nurse was not there.

"I've sent her off," Felix explained. "I much prefer to have you with me than any nurse on earth." He was dressed before ten-thirty. "Now put your things on," said he.

"What for? I don't want to go out."

"We're going out together. Look what a fine day it is! We're going to be married at eleven o'clock, at the *mairie*. Now hurry up." His voice hardened into a command.

"But--but does Dr. Samson agree to you going out?" she asked, quite overtaxed.

"Samson doesn't know, as it happens; but if he did of course he'd agree."

She might have refused to go. But could she refuse to go and be married--she, the bearer of his child? She perceived that he had been too clever for her, had trapped her, in his determination to regularize her situation at the earliest possible moment. She forced a timid smile and covered him up for the journey.

The lift-boy smiled a welcome to him. The concierge was the very symbol of attentive deference, and in the carriage enveloped Lilian's feet with the rug as though they had been two precious jewels--as they were. The manager himself made a majestic appearance, and shot out congratulations like stars from a Roman candle. And the weather was supremely gorgeous.

At the *mairie* waited the *avoué* and his clerk, who were to act as witnesses. The *avoué* and Felix talked to dirty and splendid officials; Felix and Lilian signed papers.

"Now *you*'ve only got one thing to do," said Felix. "When I nudge you, say, '*Oui, monsieur le maire*.'"

They were inducted into the sanctuary of celebration, and Lilian saw a fat gentleman wearing the French national flag for a waistband. It would have been very comical had it not been so impressive. The ceremony started, Lilian understanding not a word. Felix nudged her. She murmured: "*Oui, monsieur le maire*." ... The ceremony closed. Immediately afterwards Felix handed her a sort of little tract in a yellowish-brown cover.

"You're married now, and if anybody says you aren't, show 'em this."

The *avoué* was tremendous with bows and smiles. They drove back to the hotel. They were in the bedroom. Lilian took Felix apprehensively by the shoulders.

"Oh, darling. You're sure it hasn't done you any harm?"

"And that's not quite all. There's my will," said he. "Ring the bell."

He spoke to Jacqueline, who after a few minutes brought in an English valet and an English lady's maid. Felix was set upon having his will witnessed by people with English addresses. He silently gave Lilian the will to read. He had written it himself. In three lines it bestowed upon her all that was his. Not a syllable about his sister. Well, that was quite right, because Miss Grig had means of her own. Sitting in the easy chair, with a blotting-pad on his knees, Felix signed the will. Then the valet and the lady's maid signed, with much constraint and flourish. Felix gave them fifty francs apiece, and dismissed them.

"Put that with your marriage certificate," he said to Lilian, folding up the will and offering it to her. "I think I'll get back to bed. Exhausting work, being married!" He laughed shortly. "I'm going to sleep," he said later, after he had eaten and drunk. "You be off downstairs and have your lunch."

But, of course, she could not go downstairs. She dropped into her bed, staggered by the swift evolution of her career. Staggered by it! Lo! She was a typewriting girl wearing wristlets, poor, hopeless, with no prospects. A little while, and lo! she was the wife of a rich and brilliant adorer, and an honest man in whom her trust was absolute. And she was pregnant. Strange fear invaded her mind, the ancient fear that too much happiness is a crime that destiny will punish.

IX
The Widow

"Felix seriously ill; double pneumonia; we are married.--Lilian Grig." Ten words, plus Isabel's address and her own! She wrote the telegram after several trials, in her bedroom, on half a sheet of the hotel notepaper, Kate O'Connor standing by her side, the next morning but one.

"Give it me," said the white nurse. "I'll see to it for you, Mrs. Grig, as I go home."

She looked up at the nurse, and the nurse, eyes no longer laughing, looked down at her. The nurse knew everything, and, moreover, must have assisted at scores of tragedies; yet Lilian regarded her as an innocent who understood nothing essential in life. Her comforting kiss was like the kiss of a very capable child pretending to be grown up.

Voices in the other bedroom! The doctor had arrived and was talking to the second nurse. They went in together. Felix lay a changed man, horribly aged. He was a man who had suddenly learned that in order to live it was necessary to breathe, and that breathing may be an intensely difficult operation of mechanics. His lined, wrinkled face was drawn with the awful anxieties incident to breathing, and with the acute pain in both lungs. The enemy was growing in strength and Felix was losing strength, but he could not surrender. He must continue to struggle, despite the odds, and there was no referee to stop the fight, either on the ground that it had developed into an assassination or on any other ground. The brutality had to proceed. And the sun streamed through the window; and outside, from the promenade where the idlers were strolling and the band was playing, the window looked exactly the same as all the other windows of the enormous hotel.

After an examination, Dr. Samson injected morphia. The result was almost instantaneous. The victim, freed from the anxiety of the pain, could devote the whole of his energy to breathing. He sighed, and smiled as if he had entered paradise. He gave a few short, faint coughs, like the cough of a nervous veiled woman in church, and said in a hoarse, feeble, whispering voice:

"You must understand, doctor, it was all my fault. I insisted, and what could she do?" The two nurses modestly bent their gaze.

"Yes, yes," the doctor concurred.

Felix had already made the same announcement several times.

"But I want everybody to know," he persisted.

"Yes, yes," said the doctor. "I shall give you some oxygen this morning. It will be here in a minute. That will do you a lot of good. You'll see."

Lilian was the calmest person in the room. She had decided that there was no hope, and had braced herself and become matter-of-fact. She was full of health, power, and magnificent youth, and the living seed of Felix was within her. She quietly kissed Felix on his damp cheek; no gold now glistened in his half-empty mouth. She returned to her own bedroom, and Dr. Samson followed.

"He's much worse," she said firmly to the doctor.

"He is not better," said the doctor. "But there is always hope."

She glanced sadly at the soft and mournful face of the middle-aged doctor. Nurse Kate had told her the story of the doctor, who was a widower and solitary and possibly consumptive, and on account of his lungs practised on the Riviera during the winter. The vast tragedy of the world obsessed her; there was no joy nor pleasure in the whole world, and the ceaseless activities of gaiety that wearied the hotel and the Casino and the town and the neighbouring towns seemed to her monstrous, pathetic, and more tragic even than Felix's bed.

For five days she cabled daily to Miss Grig, and got nothing in reply. Felix's strength consistently waned. And neither morphia nor oxygen could help him more than momentarily. Jacqueline, the nurses, the doctor, treated Lilian as a holy madonna. They all exclaimed at her marvellous stedfastness. The manager of the hotel paid a decorous call of inquiry--though it was apparent that he was already familiar with every detail--and he, too, treated Lilian as a holy madonna. Two days later, in the evening, just after Nurse Kate had come on duty, Felix held out his hand for his wife's hand, and, casting off his frightful physical preoccupation, said in a normal voice:

"Everything's in order. Don't be an idle woman, my poor girl."

She dropped on her knees, and throwing her arms on his body, cried:

"Darling, I've killed you!" (The thought that she had brought about his death was her continual companion.) But Felix, utterly absorbed again in the ghastly effort to breathe, had no ears for the wild outburst. In the night he died. He had written a short note to his sister before the great relapse, and since then had not even mentioned her.

X
The Wreath

Dr. Samson sat late with Lilian in her bedroom the next night. It was the middle of the night. He was taller than Felix, and not so old; his face was more flat and milder, but there was something in his expression and about the wrinkles round his eyes that reminded her of Felix, and he had attached himself to her to serve her; his mournful gaze appealed to her. It was he who had made her understand that death in a hotel devoted to gaiety was an indiscretion, a lapse from good taste

that must be carefully hidden. He stood faithfully between her and the world, the captive of her beauty, wanting no reward but the satisfaction of having helped her.

Not that much help was needed. The routine of such episodes was apparently fixed. Things moved of themselves. All requirements seemed to be met automatically. There was even an English cemetery in the region. Early on the morning after the death a young woman in black had called to present the card of a great Paris shop with a branch in the town, and by the evening Lilian was dressed in black. The layer-out had arrived earlier yet than the dressmaker. Dr. Samson had interviewed the manager of the hotel. An important part of the routine was that the whole of the furniture of Felix's room should be removed, and the room refurnished at the cost of the representative of the dead. Dr. Samson settled the price. Lilian decided to give the old furniture to the Alexandra Hospital. The doctor had volunteered to finance Lilian till she should be back in London; but afterwards the equivalent of nearly four hundred pounds in French and English money was discovered in Felix's dispatch-case, the inside of which Lilian had never seen. The doctor had also sent off the telegram to the mute Miss Grig: "Felix died in the night; am returning London immediately," and got the railway ticket, and accomplished the legal formalities preliminary to the burial, and warned the English chaplain, and ordered a gravestone in a suitable design and taken Lilian's wishes as to the inscription thereon. Nothing remained to be done but wait. Lilian was quietly packing; the doctor sat watchful to assist. They both heard a noise in the next room; and at the noise Lilian was at last startled from her calm. The moment, then, had come. Dr. Samson went first. The room, which ought to have been in darkness, was lighted, and not by electricity but by two candles, one on either side of the bed.

"Who has done this?" Lilian murmured, and gave a sob.

The door into the corridor was locked; to keep it locked had been part of the unalterable routine. Therefore the candles could only have been brought by somebody on the staff of the hotel. The next instant Jacqueline entered, through the bathroom. She was weeping.

"Pardon me, madam. I couldn't go to bed. I couldn't sleep. And I thought of the candles. It was too much for me. I had to bring them. If I was wrong, pardon me.... *They* will be here soon." She threw herself down on her knees at the foot of the bed. She had spoken in French. The doctor interpreted.

"Tell her I thank her very much," said Lilian, "and ask her to go to bed. She'll have her work to do to-morrow, poor thing!"

Jacqueline rose. Lilian took her hand and turned away.

"And this came," Jacqueline added, pointing to a package in tissue-paper that lay on a chair. "The night porter has only just brought it up, and as I was coming

in with the candles...."

Lilian removed the tissue-paper and saw a magnificent wreath of lilies, far finer than anything in her experience, a wreath for an imperial monarch. In the middle was a white envelope. She opened the envelope; it contained two French bank-notes for five hundred francs each. No signature! Not a word!

"She has got her money," thought Lilian. "How?" And, placing the wreath on Felix's feet, she burst into tears.

Jacqueline had vanished. Suddenly Lilian began to stride to and fro across the room. She was full of youth and force. She was full of fury and resentment. The moving muscles of her splendid, healthy body could be discerned through her black dress. She frightened the doctor.

"Ah!" she cried, with a gesture towards the wreath, "she is the only one that understands that I don't *want* to be comforted! Nobody else has understood. I expect she just heard that he was dead, and she doesn't know that I killed him; but she understood. *She* understood." The doctor, quite mystified, seized her arm to soothe her, and was astonished at her strength as she shook him off. She was like a tigress. Nevertheless, she let herself be persuaded to follow him into her own room. There her eye caught the toilet preparations which the courtesan had bestowed on her.

"And she gave me these!" Lilian laughed, hesitated, and added fiercely: "I will take them back with me! I will never use them, but I will keep them for ever and ever!" And she cast them into one of the open trunks. Then she said calmly: "Of course I know it was because of the window of the car being broken, and it would have been all right if the engine hadn't stopped. But it was my silly, silly idea to go out for a drive at night.... I can't help it! I did kill him! He'd have been alive now if I hadn't behaved myself like a perfect child!"

The doctor offered no remark. She resumed all her old tranquillity, wiping her eyes carefully with a fine, tiny handkerchief that Felix had given her. The bearers arrived a quarter of an hour later--discreet, furtive and sinister. The hotel slept in its vastness. All gaiety was asleep. But even if some devoted slave of dissipation had surprised them on their way back, he could not have guessed that it was a coffin they bore. The doctor, by using his professional prestige, kept Lilian in her own room till the bearers were nearly ready to depart with more than they had brought. She went into the mortuary. The coffin was disguised. Picking up the wreath, which had been forgotten or intentionally left, she placed it upon the coffin and beneath the disguise. It lay there alone in its expensive grandeur. The bearers withdrew with their burden, tiptoeing along the dim, silent corridor lest revellers should be disturbed from well-earned, refreshing sleep and open their doors to see what was afoot in the night. The cortège was lost to view round the corner at the end of the corridor. The doctor remained a little while, and he also

prepared to go. The two nurses Lilian would never see again.

"You should go to bed now and try to sleep. I'll call for you in good time to-morrow for the funeral."

Lilian shook her head.

"No, I'm going to pack his things now." She stood at the door of his room, and watched the doctor also disappear from view round the corner at the end of the corridor.

PART IV

I
The Return

It was early in July, on one of those long summer evenings of which the melancholy twilight seems determined never to end, that Lilian, from Victoria Station, drove up to her late husband's house, now her own. The events leading to the arrival, and giving it a most poignant dramatic quality, had one after another as they occurred impressed everybody concerned as being very strange and sinister; but seen in perspective they took on a rather ordinary complexion.

At the very moment of leaving the Riviera Lilian had heard that Miss Grig, on her way to the South to see Felix, had been detained in Paris by serious ptomaine poisoning due to food eaten at home. Had Miss Grig been able to get a berth in the through Calais-Mediterranée express, she might well have died in the train; but she had not been able to get a berth, and had travelled by a service which necessitated crossing Paris by taxi. She never did cross Paris. Railway officials carried her to the Hôtel Terminus, and medical aid was obtained just in time. For several days she was lost, like a mislaid and helpless parcel in the international post. As soon as she could move again she returned home, for Felix was by then dead and buried.

Lilian, on her part, did travel towards London by the through Calais-Mediterranée express, alighting at Calais extremely exhausted after twenty-eight hours on the railway. A gale was raging in the Channel. The steamer failed to enter Dover, a colossal harbour constructed in defiance of common sense for

the inconvenience of seafarers, and put in at Folkestone. This detail changed the course of Lilian's journey. She was lifted ashore suffering acutely from sickness and nervous shock caused by the storm. At Dover she would assuredly not have remained more than a day or two; but Folkestone is a health-resort, and, installed in a big hotel on the Leas, she was tempted to let week drift after week in languid and expectant meditation. Felix's solicitor came down several times from London to see her and take her instructions. From him she had news of Miss Grig and of the business; but she neither saw Miss Grig nor heard from her; the silence between the two mourners was absolute; and Lilian would not be the first to break it; moreover, there was no official need for letters to pass, each party being always well informed of the situation through the medium of the lawyer. At the close of the Riviera season Lilian had a flattering surprise. Dr. Samson the faithful came to see her in Folkestone. He was staying at another hotel. He desired nothing, hoped for nothing, except to exhibit his fidelity. She had in him someone upon whom she could exercise her instinct to please, and to whom she could talk about the unique qualities of Felix. But also she had grown capricious and uncertain in temper. Perceiving at once that her little outbursts charmed and delighted him, she did not check them, but rather bestowed them upon him as favours; and the gloomy, fretful, transformed girl in unbecoming black played with some spirit the rôle of spoiled virgin from whom a suppliant adorer anticipates one day complete surrender. It was touching and at the same time comical.

As spring glowed into summer two factors gradually decided Lilian to proceed to London. Visitors increased in Folkestone; the Leas were no longer a desert, and she didn't care to be much remarked. And further, Dr. Samson advised her to have her child in London, and to settle there well in advance of the ordeal. He suggested more than one house; but Lilian would listen to no counsel on this matter. She gave out sharply that she would have Felix's child in Felix's house, which was her house--and nowhere else. The ever-silent Miss Grig was still there, but Lilian had no objection to her staying there. She knew what was due to her husband's sister. She sent for the solicitor and invited him to make all the arrangements, and to report when he had done so. In due course she journeyed to London, deliberately missing train after train on the day of departure. Dr. Samson accompanied her to the doorstep of her house and Felix's, he paid the taxi-driver, and then he shook hands and vanished. She wished to present herself alone, and to this end had postponed ringing the bell until all that Dr. Samson could do was done.

The facade of the house had been modernized, not untastefully, and was different from nearly all the other houses in Montpelier Square. The front door was of a rich, deep blue. The curtains of the windows had individuality. Lilian looked the façade up and down and from side to side. She had not even seen the house before; no, nor yet the Square. Felix! It was all Felix. "Felix" was written

right across it. And it was hers--at any rate, the lease of the house was hers! It belonged to none but herself. She knew the fact, but could not imaginatively grasp it, and the effort to grasp it made her feel faint with emotion. She was frightened, she was proud, she was ashamed, she was defiant, she was almost sick.

"Why did I insist on coming here like this?" she thought. "No girl was ever in such a position before!"

The blue door opened, as it were the door of a chamber of unguessed tortures. A flush spread slowly over Lilian's face.

"Now," she thought, "now I am in the middle of it all, and can't go back."

A parlourmaid stood in the doorway--tall, stiff, prim, perfect--such a creature as would have refused to recognize for fellow-creatures the cook-generals of Putney. Her mature, hard face relaxed into the minimum of a ceremonial smile.

"Oh, good evening!" said Lilian awkwardly, no better than a typewriting girl, and stepped into the house.

"Good evening'm," said the parlourmaid, and, as she realized Lilian's condition the face relented still further and its smile flickered into genuineness. Though her eyes and mouth showed that she was virtuous to the verge of insanity, she seemed to be moved, in spite of herself, by the spectacle of languid and soft and mourning Lilian.

"Miss Grig wished me to say that she is engaged for the moment. She was expecting you earlier in the day. And shall I show you the principal bedroom? And if you have any orders.... Yes'm,"--following Lilian's glance at her trunks piled in the porch--"we've got a young man in as will see to them."

Lilian sat down on an old carved chair with a wooden seat. How characteristic and horrid of Miss Grig not to be ready to receive her! Not that she, Lilian, the mistress of the house, needed a reception from anyone! Certainly not! This notion braced and fortified her. A young man did appear fussily from the dark basement staircase, and pulled the trunks one after another within the house. The front door was then shut. The hall and upward staircase were already gently lighted for the evening. Beautiful silk shades over the two lamps! Not a very large house, nor very luxurious! But the carpets, furniture, and pictures had for Lilian just the peculiar distinction which she had hoped for. They recalled the illustrations of interiors in *The Studio* which used to come every month to Putney; and they were utterly different from the Putney furniture. Felix! All Felix! No Miss Grig! Impossible that there should be a trace of Miss Grig anywhere! This interior had been Felix's habitation. In a sense it was the history of Felix, his mind, his taste. She would have to study it, to learn it.

This interior was the first family interior she had seen since Putney. She was entering it after a period of awful lodging-houses and garish impersonal hotels. It was touchingly beautiful to her. The baby should be born in it, should grow

up in it, should know it as the home of memory.... Then it became a vision, a hallucination, and the owning of it became an illusion. How could she own it? Only yesterday Miss Grig had thrown her out of Clifford Street with ten days' wages for a weapon to fight the whole world with. All that had happened since was untrue and hadn't happened.

"I'll go upstairs," she said coldly to the parlour-maid. She had to be cold in order to be dignified. Milly Merrislate used to pose like that sometimes. The resemblance annoyed her, but what could she do in her weakness against the power of the situation? She did as best she might.

On the first floor the parlourmaid, switching lights off and on, said:

"This is the bathroom and so on."

"Yes. That is Miss Grig's room," in a hushed voice.

Lilian murmured no affirmative at the face of the shut door; her eyes had a gleam of cruelty, and involuntarily her hands clenched. The house began to grow enormous, endless.

"This is the principal bedroom." They went into it. Curtains drawn. Two soft lights. A narrowish bed. The dressing-table naked. A wonderful easy-chair. Polished surfaces everywhere. Cunning, mild tints--the whole mysteriously beautiful. Felix! She sank into the easy-chair, drawing off her black gloves. Another maid and the young man were bumping the trunks up the stairs.

"Will you have everything brought in here'm?"

"Please." She asked that two of the trunks should be pushed under the bed; they were Felix's. The other maid and the young man departed.

"Will you take anything'm?"

"No, thank you."

The parlourmaid softened again.

"Some tea and some nice bread-and-butter?"

Lilian gave a smile of appreciation, and thought:

"I will make this girl fond of me."

"Up here'm?"

"Yes, please."

She was alone. The room was full of secrets. She opened a wardrobe, and started back; it held Felix's suits. She gazed at herself in the mirror of the naked dressing-table; tears were slipping down her wasted white cheeks. Mechanically she pulled at a drawer. Neckties, scores of them, neatly arranged. Could one man have possessed so many neckties? She picked up a necktie at random, striped in violent colours. She did not know, and could not have known, that the colours were those of a famous school club. She was entirely ignorant of the immense, the unparalleled prestige of club colours in the organized life of the ruling classes. Mechanically again, she put the necktie to her mouth, nibbled at it, bit it passion-

ately, voluptuously; the feel of the woven stuff thrilled her; and that club necktie was understood, comprehended, realized, as no club necktie ever before in all the annals of the sacred public-school tradition. Lilian sobbed like a child. The parlourmaid entered with the tea and the nice bread-and-butter, and saw the child munching the necktie, and was shaken in the steely citadel of her virtue.

"You'll feel better when you've drunk this'm," said the parlourmaid lumpily, pouring out some tea. "Hadn't you better sit down'm? ... It won't do for you to tire yourself."

God! The highly-trained girl so far forgot herself as to spill a tear into the milk-jug!

II
Miss Grig

Lilian, having fulfilled the prophecy of the parlour-maid and felt better after drinking the tea, had just released her shoulders from her dust cloak and dropped her forlorn little hat on the carpet, when she heard a firm, light tap.

"May I come in?"

Miss Grig entered and shut the door carefully.

Lilian tried to get up from the low easy chair.

"Please! Please! Don't move. You must be exhausted."

Miss Grig advanced and shook hands. Lilian raised her eyes and lowered them. Miss Grig was shockingly, incredibly aged. In eight months she had become an old woman and a tragic woman. (The lawyer had omitted to furnish Lilian with this information.) But she was not less plump. Indeed, owing to the triumph of her instinctive negligence in attire over an artificial coquetry no longer stimulated by the presence of a worshipped man, she seemed stouter and looser than ever. She was dressed for the street.

Lilian, extremely perturbed, looked at the dilapidation and thought: "I have done this." She also thought: "This is the woman that turned me out of my situation because she fancied Felix was after me--not me after Felix. What a cruel shame it was!" And thus, though she felt guilty, she felt far more resentful than guilty. What annoyed her was that she felt so young and callow in face of the old woman, and that she was renewing the humiliating sensations of their previous interview.

She felt like the former typist, and the wedding-ring on her finger had somehow no force to charm away this feeling so uncomfortable and illogical. She was not aware that her own appearance, pathetic in its unshapely mingling of the girl and the matron, was in turn impressively shocking to Miss Grig.

"I thought I ought just to say good-bye to you before leaving," said Miss Grig in a calm, polite but quavering voice.

"Are you leaving?" Lilian exclaimed foolishly. "I expected you to----"

"Felix left everything to you----"

"I had nothing at all to do with the will--I----"

"Oh no! I didn't suppose for a moment you had. Felix would never consult anybody in such matters. I'm not complaining. Felix was quite right. He made you his wife and he left you everything. It might have been different if I'd had no money of my own. But, thank God, I'm independent! And I prefer to have my own home." The tone was unexceptionable, and yet Miss Grig managed to charge with the most offensive significance the two phrases: "*He made you his wife*" and "*Thank God* I'm independent." It was as if she had said: "He raised you up from being his kept woman to be his wife--he made you honest--and he needn't have done!" and, "If I'd been at the mercy of a chit like you----!"

But Lilian, while she fully noticed it, was insensible to the offence. She was thinking as she sat huddled beneath Miss Grig erect:

"Who won? You didn't. I did. You thought you'd finished me. But you hadn't."

And added to this was the scarcely conscious exultation of youth and energy confronting the end of a career. The man for whom they had fought was dead and long decayed, but they were still fighting. It was terrible. Lilian's feelings were terrible; she realized that they were terrible; but they were her feelings. Worse, crueller than all, she reflected:

"One day you will come and swallow your pride and beg me humbly for a sight of his child!"

Miss Grig continued with wonderful dignity:

"As I say, I thought it proper to stay till you actually arrived, and formally hand over. Though really there's nothing to be done. I hope you'll find everything to your satisfaction. The servants will stay, at any rate as long as you need them. Of course, I told them beforehand how things are with you. The household accounts I've given to Mr. Farjiac to-day" (Mr. Farjiac was the solicitor). "And"--she opened her Dorothy bag--"here are the keys. Masters--that's the parlourmaid--will tell you which is which."

Instead of handing the keys to Lilian, she dropped them by the necktie on the dressing-table, where they made a disturbing noise in collision with the glass-top--as if they had cracked the glass (but they had not).

"I think that's everything."

"But about the business?" Lilian asked weakly.

"Oh yes, of course, I was forgetting. Mr. Farjiac knows all about it. I've left Gertie Jackson in charge. She's very capable and devoted. You needn't go near the place unless you care to. I've told her she should come and see you to-morrow."

"But are you giving it up entirely?" Lilian, who had heard not a word from the lawyer as to this abandonment, was ready to cry.

"How can I give up what doesn't belong to me?" asked Miss Grig, with a revolting sweetness like the taste of horseflesh. "The business is yours, and it was never mine. I merely managed it."

"Won't you take it?" Lilian burst out, losing self-control in the reaction of her natural benevolence against the awful bitterness of the scene. "Take it all for yourself. I would so like you to have it. I know you love it."

Miss Grig's tone in reply recalled the young widow to the dreadful proprieties of the interview.

"No, thank you," said she coldly, with the miraculous duplicity of wounded arrogance, "I'm only too glad to be rid of the responsibility and the hard work--at my age. I only did it all to please Felix. So that now he's dead.... By the way, I think I ought to let you know that my poor brother's grave is sadly neglected. And the headstone has a terribly foreign look. And it's all sunk in sideways, because you didn't give the ground time to settle before you had it fixed."

Miss Grig's "By the way" information absolutely effaced the effect on Lilian of the magnificent lie which preceded it. She was staggered and she was insulted and outraged. Had Miss Grig dared, without warning her, to go down to the Riviera and examine Felix's grave?

"You've been there?" she demanded brokenly. Miss Grig nodded.

"I ventured," she said, with haughty deference, "to give orders about it. I hope you don't disapprove."

"When did you go?"

"Oh! Not long since," said Miss Grig casually, carelessly, victoriously. "I must leave you now. I think I've had all my own things removed, and I hope nothing that belongs to you. If there's anything wrong, or anything I can do, will you write to Mr. Farjiac?"

She smiled gravely, steadily, and shook hands; and carried off her grief, her frustration, her ever-lasting tragedy, safe and intact and with pomp away from the poor, pretty little chit whom destiny had chosen to be the instrument of devastation.

Lilian sat dulled. The keys of the house lay beside the damp and creased club necktie. She heard a taxi arrive and the door bang and the taxi depart. A hot, dry, mournful wind of the summer night blew the curtains with a swish suddenly in-

wards and made Lilian shiver. Ah! What would she not have given for an endless, tearful, sobbing talk with the only other creature on earth who had worshipped Felix? How she would have confessed, abased herself, accused herself, excused herself, abandoned herself, uncovered her inmost soul, at the signal of one soft word from Isabel Grig! Hellish pride! Hellish implacable rancour! Glutton of misery! The woman had not even offered a syllable of goodwill for the welfare of the coming baby! Nevertheless, Lilian's heart was breaking for Isabel Grig. Who could blame Isabel? Or who Lilian? The situation inevitably arising from their characters and from the character of the dead man had overpowered both of them. Lilian thought of the neglected grave, and of the courtesan's prayer, "Eternal peace! No emotions! Stretched straight out. Quiet for ever and ever! Eternal peace!" In the indulgence of grief and depression she wanted to keep that thought. But she could not. She was too young and too strong, and the edges of the dangerous future were iridescent.

III
The Lieutenant

Lilian slept heavily and without moving, and when the parlourmaid aroused her with more tea at nine o'clock according to order, she drank half the first cup before the process of waking was complete. Her mind had been running jerkily:

"So she actually went all that way to see his grave. And I haven't seen the stone myself. Of course Felix wrote to her when he was getting better, and told her he was going to marry me. That's how she must have first known I was out there with him. He wrote on purpose to tell her. And she went all that way to see my darling's grave, and never said a word to me! It's her feeling for Felix makes her so cruel, poor thing! Oh! But she's so hard, *hard*! Well, I could never be hard like that--I don't care what happened. And it won't make her any happier."

The parlourmaid returned with a parcel.

"Oh yes, I know what that is," said Lilian. "Just cut the string and put it down here, will you?"

"Miss Jackson is waiting to see you'm. Will you see her or shall I ask her to call to-night?"

"Miss Jackson!" Lilian exclaimed, agitated by the swiftness of the sequence

of events. "Has she been waiting long?"

"No'm. Only about twenty minutes."

"Why didn't you tell me before?"

"I thought you ought to have your tea quiet'm."

"How nice of you!" said Lilian, with a weak, acquiescent smile. "But do ask her to come in here now. She won't mind me being in bed, will she?"

"I should hope not'm," said the parlourmaid, pawing the ground.

Lilian pushed her lustreless hair out of her eyes. The sun was shining on part of the tumbled bed. Then Gertie Jackson came in. Absolutely unchanged! The same neat, provincial, Islingtonian toilette. The same serious, cheerful, ingenuous gaze. The same unmarred complexion. The same upright pose and throwing back of the shoulders in unconscious rectitude and calm intention to front courageously the difficulties of the day. The same mingling of self-respect and deference. She bent over the bed; Lilian held up her face like a child with mute invitation, and Gertie kissed her. What a fresh, honest, innocent, ignorant kiss on Lilian's hot, wasted, experienced cheek!

"You poor thing!" Gertrude murmured devotedly.

"I'm seven months gone nearly," Lilian murmured, as if in despair.

"Well, it'll soon be over, then!" said Gertie buoyantly, in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Yes, but shall I ever again be like I was?" Lilian demanded gloomily.

"Of course you will, dear. *And* prettier. They almost always are, you know. I've often noticed it."

"You dear!" cried Lilian, "and do you mean to say you've got up earlier and come all the way down from Islington here to see me before going to the office? And me keeping you waiting!"

"Why! But of course I came. I'm responsible to you, now poor Miss Grig's gone. I told her I would be. And I can't tell you how glad I shall be if I suit you and you find you can keep me on. It's such a good situation."

Lilian lifted her face again and kissed her--but not the kiss of gratitude (though there was gratitude in it), the kiss of recompense, of reward. It was Lilian who, in allowing herself to be faithfully served, was conferring the favour. Gertrude was the eternal lieutenant, without ambition, without dreams, asking only to serve with loyalty in security. In that moment Lilian understood as never before the function of these priceless Gertrudes whose first instinct when they lost one master was to attach themselves to another.

"Look here!" said Lilian. "D'you know what I want? I want you to come and live here till it's over."

"Of course I will," Gertrude agreed, eagerly ready to abandon her domestic habits and interior for as long as she was required to do so, and to resume them

whenever it might suit Lilian's convenience. And all because Lilian had been beautiful and successful, and would be beautiful and successful once more!

"You must come to-night, will you?" Lilian insisted, transformed in a moment into the spoilt and exacting queen.

Gertrude nodded, brightly beaming.

"I do so want to talk to you," Lilian went on. "I've had nobody to talk to for--I mean like you. D'you know, Felix would have been alive now if it hadn't been for me." She burst into tears, and then, recovering, began an interminable detailed recital of events on the Riviera, coupled with a laudation of Felix. She revelled in it, and was shameless, well aware that Gertrude would defend her against herself. The relief which she felt was intense.

At the end of half an hour, when the torrent had slackened, Gertrude said:

"I really think I'd better be going now. What time would you like me to come to-night? I'm quite free because I'm not taking night duty this week. It's Milly's week." And as she was leaving she turned back rather nervously to the bed. "D'you mind me suggesting one thing? I wouldn't have you over-tire yourself; but if you could just show yourself at the office, I feel it would be such a good thing for all of us. The girls would understand then who the new employer is. Some of them are very stupid, you know. If you could just show yourself--a quarter of an hour. It's for your own sake, dear."

"As I am? I mean--you know----"

"Why not?"

"But would they----"

"Of course not," blandly and firmly decided Gertrude, who had been brought up in Islington, where the enterprise of procreation proceeds on an important scale and in a straightforward spirit. Strange that in Gertrude's virginal mentality such realism could coexist with such innocent ingenuousness! But it was so.

When Gertrude had left, Lilian opened the parcel. It was from Dr. Samson and contained two books recommended and promised by him about preparing for motherhood, and motherhood, and cognate matters. The mere titles of the chapters entranced her.

IV
The New Employer

Appreciably less than a year had passed since she went down those office stairs, thrust out by the implacable jealousy of Miss Grig, and yet in that short time the stairs had shrunk and become most painfully dingy. The sight of them saddened her; she wondered how it was that their squalor had not affected her before. She felt acutely sorry for the girl named Lilian Share who in the previous autumn used easily to run up them from bottom to top, urged by the consciousness of being late. Now she had to take the second flight very slowly. The door opened as she reached it, and Gertie Jackson emerged to usher her in. A dozen pairs of ears had been listening for her arrival. The doors of both the large and the small rooms were ajar, and she had glimpses of watching faces as she went with Gertrude into the principal's room. She was intensely nervous and self-conscious. Gertrude explained that Miss Grig had installed her in the principal's room months ago, and Lilian said that that was quite right, and Gertrude said that she had hoped Lilian would approve.

Tea was laid on one of the desks, a dainty tea, such a tea as Lilian had never seen in the office, with more pastry than even two girls could eat who had had no lunch and expected no dinner; an extravagant display. Then a flapper entered with the tea-pot and the hot-water jug, and Lilian smiled at her, and the flapper blushed and smiled and tossed her winged pigtail. The flapper had a shabby air. Lilian could swallow only one cake because Gertrude was sitting where Felix had sat when he first told her what she might do and ought to do with herself.

"I am so glad you've come!" said Gertrude, in a sort of rapture.

"Yes," Lilian agreed with dignity. "I was bound to come, of course."

She felt wise and mature and tremendously aware of her responsibilities; and she intended to remain so. Nobody should be able to say of her that she had lost her head or that she was silly or weak or in any way unequal to her situation. Above all, Miss Grig should be forced to continue to respect her.

"I suppose I'd better just go and see them all now," she suggested, after more tea.

"They'd be delighted if you would," said Gertrude, as if the thing had not already been arranged.

Naturally Lilian honoured the small room first. The three inhabitants of the small room--two of them were unknown to her--sprang up, flattered, ruffled, flustered, excited, at her entrance. There she stood, the marvellous, the semi-legendary Lilian, who had captured the aristocratic master, run off with him to the Continent, married him, buried him, inherited all his possessions, and was soon going to have a baby. Her famous beauty was under eclipse, her famous figure had grown monstrous beyond any possible concealment; but she was still marvellous. She was the most romantic figure that those girls had ever seen; she was all picture-paper serials and cinema films rolled together and come to

life and reality. Her prestige was terrific. She felt it and knew it and acted on it. How pathetically common the girls were, how slave-like! How cheap their frocks! How very small the room (but evidently it had been tidied for her visit)! She recognized one of the old Underwoods by a dent in its frame, and remembered the stain on one of the green lampshades, and the peculiarities of the woodwork of the absurdly small mirror. She was touched; she might have wept a little, but her great pride--in her achievement, in her position, in her condition, even in her tragic sorrow--upheld her safely. Tenderly invited to sit down, she sat down, and she put expert questions, to the wonderment of practising typists, thus proving that she was not proud. And then with gracious adieux she proceeded to the large room where, though her stay was (properly) more brief, she created still more sensation. In the large room she surprised one or two surreptitious exchanges of glance betraying a too critical awareness on the part of some that she had sinned against the code and perhaps only saved herself by the skin of her teeth. These unkind exhibitions did not trouble her in the least. The demeanour of the more serious and best-paid girls showed absolutely no *arrière pensée*, and better than anybody else they knew what was what in the real world. Gertrude Jackson, the honest soul of purity, already adored her employer.

As these two were returning to the principal's room the entrance-door opened and Millicent Merrislate burst breathlessly in.

"How splendid!" exclaimed Gertrude.

She had sent a special message to Milly, and Milly for a sight of her new mistress had got up and come to the office two hours earlier than her official time. Lilian was amazed and very pleased. She remembered that she had once spent at any rate one night of toil in perfect friendliness with the queer, flat, cattish Millicent; and now she insisted on Milly helping them to eat cakes in the sacred room. The scene was idyllic. A little later Lilian, having arranged the details of Gertrude's temporary removal to Montpelier Square, announced that she must go, on account of some important shopping. Gertrude, sternly watchful against undue fatigue for Lilian, raised her eyebrows at the mention of shopping, but Lilian reassured her. A taxi was fetched by the flapper-of-all-work, and, noticing then for the first time that the road repairs in the neighbourhood were all finished, and every trace of them vanished, Lilian gave the driver an address in Piccadilly. Several girls were watching her departure from the windows; her upward glance caught them in the act, and the heads disappeared sharply within.

"They are all working for *me*!" she thought with complacency, and could

scarcely believe the wonderful thing.

V
Layette

The pride of her reception in Clifford Street wafted her easily up the somewhat austere stairs of the first floor establishment in Piccadilly. She had long been familiar with the face of the commissionaire, and the brass signs, of this mysterious shop, but never till the leading word attracted her eyes as she was driving from Montpelier Square to Clifford Street had it occurred to her what the word signified. The deceiving staircase led to splendid rooms, indicating that the renown of the establishment could not be spurious. A bright and rosy young woman came smilingly forward and gave Lilian a chair. One other customer, a stout lady with her back to the world, was being served in a distant corner. A marvellous calm reigned, and the noise of Piccadilly seemed to beat vainly against the high, curtained windows.

"Layettes?" Lilian began questioningly, with a strange exultation. The aspect of the interior had revived her taste for luxury while giving it a new direction.

"Yes, madam."

The esoteric conversation was engaged. Lilian sat entranced by the fineness and the diminutiveness and the disconcerting elegance of the display ranged abroad for her on the glass counter. She was glad that through culpable sloth she had done absolutely nothing as yet with her own needle. It was the books from Dr. Samson that had aroused her to the need for action of some sort, for she had had no wise woman to murmur in her eager ear the traditions and the Spanish etiquette of centuries of civilized maternity.

"I shall bring Gertie to see these to-morrow," she thought. "It will please her frightfully to come, and she'll stop me from being too extravagant. Only I must arrange it so that her work won't be interfered with. Perhaps at lunch time. Never do to upset discipline right at the start!"

And she asked to see still more stock. The articles stimulated her memory and her imagination into a kind of tranquil and yet rapturous contemplation of the events, voluptuous, tender and tragic, which had set her where she was. The thrill of conception, the long patience of gestation, the coming terror of labour

mingled all together in her now mystical mind. Her destiny had been changed, or at least it was gravely diverted. Instead of glittering in public as the lovely darling and blossom of luxurious civilization, and in private rendering a man to the highest possible degree happy--instead of this she was secretly and obscurely building a monument, in her body and also in her heart, to Felix--Felix whom already she had raised to be the perfect man, Felix who might have been alive then if she had not one evening behaved like a child, or if his sense of his duty towards her had not been so imperious. (Her commonsense had at last cured her of regarding herself as his murderess.) Whether she had loved him to the height of which she was capable of passionate love was doubtful. But she had profoundly admired him; she had been passionately grateful to him for his love of her; and, come what might when her beauty was restored to its empire, no other man could ever stand to her in the relation in which Felix had stood. He had set his imprint upon her and created her a woman. And so she was creating him a god.

All these movements of her brooding mind originated from the spectacle of the articles on the counter. They did not prevent her from discussing layettes with the bright, rosy, shop-girl. That innocent, charming and unimaginative young creature fingered the treasures with the casualness of use. For her layettes were layettes, existing of and for themselves; they connoted nothing.

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